ADULT ANCESTRAL LANGUAGE LEARNING AND EFFECTS ON IDENTITY

By

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored the relationship between Gwich'in adult language learning and identity development. Identity is dynamic, fluid and reflects how a person positions themselves and is positioned by others. A person's sense of self influences their feelings, actions, and behaviors.

Using grounded theory as an analytical tool and activity theory as a theoretical lens, this study offers self-as-a leading activity as a way to conceptualize the identity formation of two adult Gwich'in language learners.

The way a person looks is not a factor in Gwich'in identity, and also to claim the identity of being Gwich'in, one does not have to know the language. There are other strong identity markers, such as cultural knowledge, knowing who your ancestors were and where you came from. However, those who are learning the Gwich'in language feel a stronger connection to gain deeper insights into the Gwich'in worldview.

The final outcome of this research are the implications of Activity Theory, which can be used as an analytical tool. Using Activity Theory can help explain for language learners and others, the rules, division of labor, and help identify tensions or contradictions between what the community want to see happen for language learning. The data in this research identifies tensions or contradictions that the main participants experienced, such as the need for positive support, language usage, and practicing to gain proficiency.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Page

List of Tables

Page

List of Appendices

Page

Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The intention of this research is to provide insights into the area of second language acquisition and identity for Gwich'in, as well as for other ancestral language learners. A sense of identity grounds a person and provides them with a sense of place, belonging and emotional well-being. It makes up who they are, where they stand on issues, how they maneuver themselves to be who they are. There are many reasons why Indigenous people want to learn their ancestral language, whether it is to be able to connect more deeply with grandparents or ancestors, be able to understand what is so funny in the language, or to establish a sense of belonging. Language plays a large role in the formation of our identities (Hoffman, 1990; Kaplan, 1993; González, 2005). Yet, there are obstacles such as historical circumstances (Sims, 2004), English-Only and other monolingual language ideologies (Bell, 2006; Bender, 2009), and resultant language policies (Alton, 1998; Crawford, 1995) that affect Indigenous peoples. Indigenous community members want their languages to be learned, but historical trauma for language learning creates obstacles for many language learners. Many Indigenous people want to learn their own languages, which sometimes results in a wide range of success in terms of language learning outcomes. This begs to question (1) what does it take for Indigenous people to learn their language?, and (2) what is the relationship between identity and language learning?

As a result, the focus of this research will be on how identities are formed as ancestral language learning takes place. In this research, eleven Gwich'in participants were asked about their language learning, and how it affected them and their identities as Gwich'in people.

Gwich'in is an Athabascan language spoken in northeastern Alaska and northwestern Canada (see Figure 1.1); however this research focuses on Gwich'in in Alaska. There are approximately 1100 Gwich'in in Alaska (The Endangered Languages Project, 2007) with about

270 speakers. The age range of the speakers is from their late 20s to their late 90s (Sikorski, 2008). I am defining a speaker as someone who has various levels of proficiencies in the language—whether it be listening, reading, writing, speaking or a combination thereof.

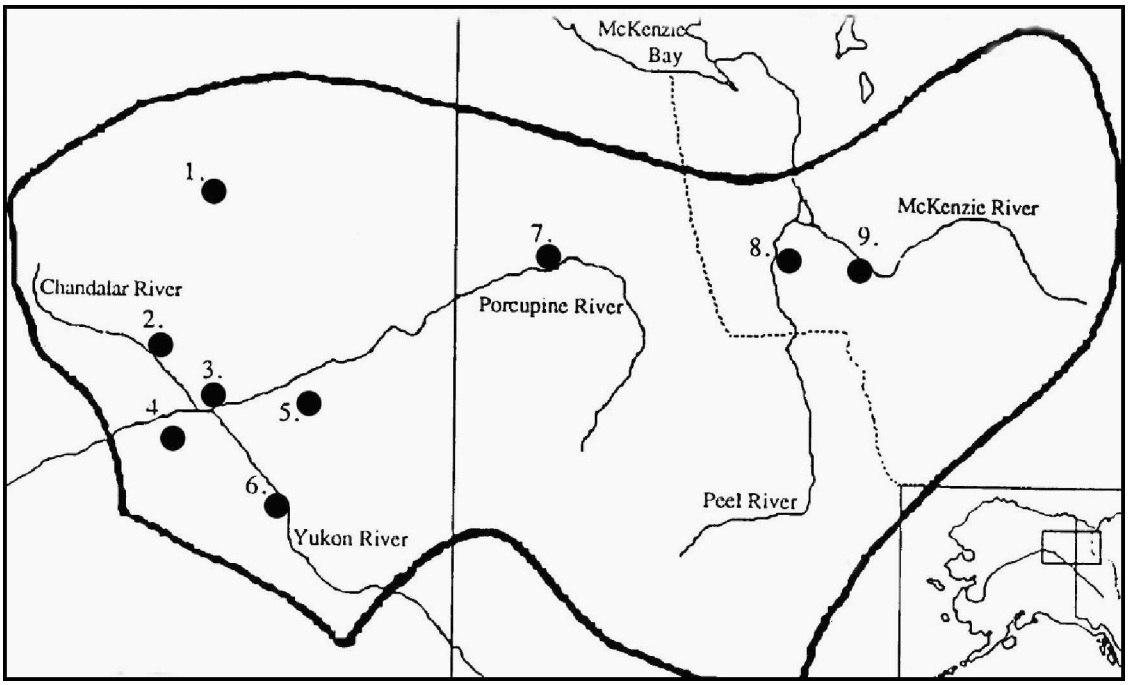

Figure 1.1. Gwich'in Communities: 1. Arctic Village, 2. Venetie, 3. Fort Yukon, 4. Birch Creek, 5. Chalkyitsik, 6. Circle, 7. Old Crow, 8. Fort McPherson, 9. Tsiigehtshik

Alaska has twenty different Indigenous languages (see Figure 1.2). Language families include: (a) Eskimo-Aleut (four Eskimo languages and Aleut), (b) Athabascan-Eyak-Tlingit (eleven Athabascan languages, Eyak, and Tlingit), (c) Haida, and (d) Tsimshian. All of these languages, including Gwich'in, are endangered because most of the languages are no longer being learned by children as a first language (Krauss, 1997). In general, language endangerment across Alaska began with the introduction of formal education through western schools and ensuing anti-Native language policy, most prominently by Alaska's first Commissioner of Education (1885-1908), Sheldon Jackson. This anti-Native language policy was based on American ideals of assimilation. Thus, Native languages were forbidden to be spoken in the

schools, and if so, speakers were physically and mentally punished. At home, parents were urged to speak only English to their children. This anti-Native language attitude by non-Natives in schools and churches continued for at least 50 years (Krauss, 1980). With the forced suppression of Native language use across Alaska, came many social ills as different Native groups were being "assimilated" (Hensley, 2009; Wallis, 2002).

Schooling of Gwich'in people began with the Episcopal missionaries in 1896 in the Gwich'in villages of Fort Yukon and Circle. As Alaska transformed from a territory to the State of Alaska, different acts were passed regarding schooling for Native peoples of Alaska. As a result of these acts, various departments of education were formed and each had their effect on the type of schooling that was available. Schools were established in Gwich'in territory as early as 1896, and thereafter elementary schools were established in ten Gwich'in villages. In 1920, territorial and State schools were established in six Gwich'in villages. After that in 1976, Regional Educational Attendance Area (REAA) schools were established in various regions throughout the State, and as a result seven elementary schools were built throughout the Gwich'in region (Barnhardt, 1985).

Currently, several schools in Gwich'in country offer bilingual/bicultural Gwich'in programs. These classes tend to focus on cultural practices rather than the Gwich'in language. Students do learn some Gwich'in vocabulary but the classes are more geared to learning about Gwich'in culture.

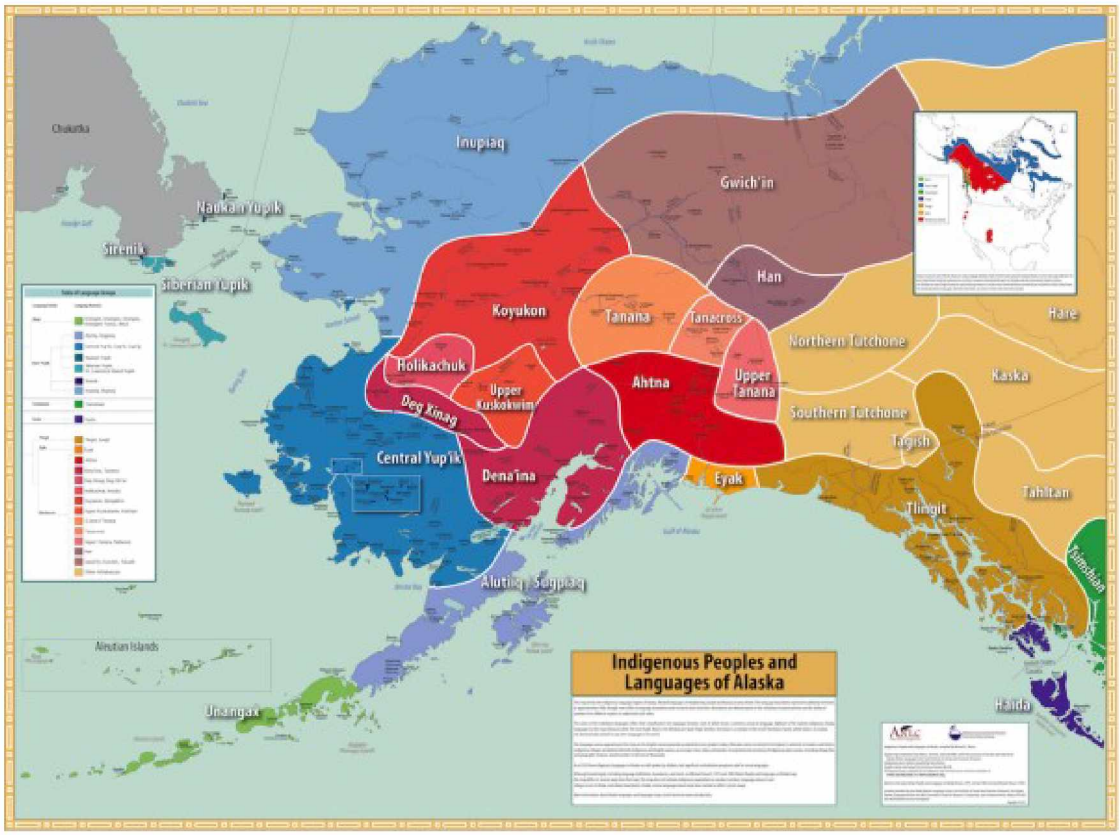

Figure 1.2. Alaska's Native Languages (Alaska Native Language Archive, 2013).

Purpose of Research

The purposes for this dissertation are to: (1) explore how personal and communal factors influence learning Gwich'in; (2) determine what language learners can do to learn Gwich'in, and what kinds of community support can or should be provided to encourage their efforts, and (3) investigate how language is part of "being Gwich'in", according to the Gwich'in participants in this study.

As an Indigenous researcher, it is my greatest hope, that this research will be beneficial to my own people. And to cast a wider net, to other Indigenous people as well. Many people throughout the world are aware that Indigenous people are losing their language to the dominant languages wherever they may reside. Since my research is about language and identity, I hope that I will gain insight into what can be done to hold on to our ancestral languages.

The subject of identity is a fairly broad topic, and will need to be narrowed down to identities as they relate to learning a second language. Learning a language may have an effect on the person's identity and vice versa. Learning a second language requires a lot of energy from a person when she is learning because she needs to practice the language in an appropriate cultural context. However, there are obstacles to overcome which can be intimidating. Furthermore, language learning is not a static type of learning; rather it is fluid and changes depending on the people and situations that present themselves.

Language learning requires time, energy, thought, and commitment. It can also be an emotional process because of past histories that attempted to ignore the ancestral language and assimilate Indigenous people into society at large. Therefore, it will be necessary to see what language learners are actively doing in order to be successful, and how this relates to identity. Discovering successful strategies could be a useful tool for other language learners, specifically Indigenous language learners.

Research Questions

This study is a qualitative inquiry into identity in ancestral language learning. The following guiding questions helped shape the interview topics, literature review and analysis.

What are the experiences of ancestral language learners of Gwich'in?

How do Gwich'in ancestral language learners understand these experiences in relation to identity? In view of the construction of Gwich'in ancestral language learners' identities, what do participants state about the role of the community?

Learning a language is at the heart of these questions. This means it is important to briefly discuss what it means to know a language.

Proficiency in a Language

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) broadly defines language proficiency in terms of what a person can do with a language. Proficiency relates to speaking, reading, writing, or listening in "real-world situations in a spontaneous and non-rehearsed context". Within each of the skills of speaking, reading, writing, and listening proficiencies, there are levels: novice, intermediate, and advanced. Each of these is divided into subcategories of low, mid, and high ranges. Furthermore, ACTFL also added the category of "distinguished" as a further level of proficiency in the areas of speaking and writing. When assessing speaking proficiency, the following criteria are based on (1) global tasks and functions; (2) context/content; (3) accuracy, and (4) text type (ACTFL, 2012; Omaggio Hadley, 2001).

Global tasks and functions indicate what the speaker can do in real-world tasks. In the novice level, this may indicate that the speaker can (1) name objects; (2) do basic greetings or (3) use formulaic phrases. At the intermediate level, a speaker may be able to begin and maintain conversation by (1) answering simple questions and/or (2) asking for information. When speakers are at the advanced level, they are adept at describing something at length, and use different timeframes, such as in present, past or future tenses. Finally, at the top levels, speakers are able to speak accurately and engage fully in conversations on a variety of topics that may be concrete or abstract.

Global tasks and functions that learners of Gwich'in have are at novice, intermediate, advanced, and some may be at the top levels. Beginning Gwich'in language learners at the novice level can name various foods, ask how you are doing, introduce themselves in a culturally appropriate way, and ask about the weather. At the intermediate level, Gwich'in language learners can ask questions about everyday activities, such as eating or cooking. In seeking

information, they are able to ask how another person is doing or where someone's parents live. At the advanced level, learners are able to use a wide variety of vocabulary, and can use the present, past, and future tenses. There are a few language learners who are at the distinguished level. They are able to use liturgical language or translate abstract materials, such as voting rights. These language learners can communicate in a variety of situations with accuracy.

Speaking in *context* indicates under what circumstances the speaker is involved or the setting in which they find themselves when they are using the language. Speakers at the lower levels of proficiency are able to speak in predictable circumstances by using memorized phrases, such as those that pertain to daily life in the present here and now context. Speakers at the higher levels of proficiency are flexible in unpredictable situations, such as politics and areas that are beyond situations that may involve, for instance, talking about food or greetings. *Content*, on the other hand, refers to the kinds of topics about which one can speak, and is dependent on the interests and background of the speaker. However, at the lower levels of proficiency, topics tend to focus on concrete items that are autobiographical in nature, along with personal experiences and interests. With increased proficiency, speakers can easily speak on a wider variety of topics.

Both of the main participants have been students in the beginning Gwich'in class at the university. They are able to use present tense verbs, and some of their vocabulary may be memorized. Content, or topics that beginning Gwich'in language learners are exposed to are a variety of thematic units, such as food, kinship terms, animals, etc. As these beginning students advance, they are able to add the past and present tenses to their discourse. Most of the conversation is about what is going on in their life or in the classroom. The context in which advanced learners of Gwich'in speak include conferences or at gatherings, such as language

conferences or fiddle dances. Topics vary greatly, and largely depend on the interests of the speakers.

Accuracy refers to how well a speaker may be understood by other speakers when speaking. At the novice level, although they may be accurate with limited memorized phrases, speakers have a propensity for making mistakes that make it difficult for them to be understood. Speakers at the intermediate level of proficiency may be understood by Native speakers, but they may have to repeat themselves; whereas, those at the higher levels are understood without difficulty.

Accuracy for beginning learners of the Gwich'in language may include some sounds that are difficult to produce, such as the barred l (ɬ). Other accuracy complications may include word order and grammatical mistakes. At the intermediate level, learners may be more inquisitive and want to know how to use various lexical items and grammar. At times, seeking and understanding how to use words and grammar leads to confusion for them to be understood by other speakers. At other times, there are dialectal differences that prove to be difficult.

Finally, the notion of *text type* refers to the level of discourse within which speakers can function. Novice speakers are able to use individual phrases and words; intermediate speakers are able to create sentences; and those at the higher levels are able to speak an extended amount of speech, which is paragraph-length discourse.

Gwich'in novice speakers use individual phrases and words, but in Gwich'in, one word can equal an entire sentence or question. Some of the novice learners of Gwich'in can carry on a very limited conversation. With intermediate learners of Gwich'in, their sentences are longer and more complicated, and they may be creative with their knowledge of the language. Higher level

language learners are able to speak in prolonged sentences or tell traditional stories. They have a rich array of vocabulary, and can talk about events of long ago or in the future.

The idea of proficiency parameters through ACTFL for speaking, reading, writing, and listening competence is significant for some of the Gwich'in participants and the main participants because the idea of being proficient is applicable to anyone (learner or speaker) regarding what they can do in the language.

Typically, at the time of this writing, Gwich'in people who are 60 or older spoke Gwich'in as their first language and learned English as a second language. With the Gwich'in language shift to English, 50 year old Gwich'in people grew up bilingual while those in their 40s and younger learned English as their first language. Most Gwich'in who are in their 30s and 20s are essentially English speakers with little or no proficiency in Gwich'in.

Researcher's Language Learning History

In my own language learning history, I grew up with English as my first language, which I learned at home and in the public school. My parents' first language was Gwich'in, and as a result, they spoke Gwich'in in the home with everyone in the household and community, therefore, I understood spoken Gwich'in very well, which makes me a latent speaker. Being a latent speaker means that I did not speak Gwich'in, but I understood spoken Gwich'in. According to the ACTFL listening guidelines, at this point in my life, I possessed advanced mid-level listening skills because I was able to understand what was being said to me. However, I was at a novice-low in speaking, and did not possess reading or writing skills in Gwich'in. Also, at the time that I was growing up, my parents were encouraged by missionaries and school teachers to speak English to us.

At a much later time during adulthood, I took an interest in learning to speak Gwich'in. This happened because I was working at the university where Gwich'in language classes were being offered, and I enrolled. After taking two semesters of the Gwich'in language, I would consider myself to be at a novice mid-level speaker. The novice mid-level speaker can only communicate at a minimal level by using memorized phrases and could hardly say any long sentences. My answers were not very long, usually a couple of words. It was difficult for others to understand me because I did not know how to conjugate verbs, which is the crux of the Gwich'in language.

At the same time that I took Gwich'in language classes, I also enrolled in a special course on Gwich'in grammar, where I learned the structure of the language, and how to read and write in the language. According to ACTFL for reading and writing skills, I attained intermediate mid-level skills in these areas. These were all good foundational structures, but I still could not speak very well. What I needed was someone who was extremely patient, kind, and supportive of being able to speak. I found all of these qualities in the university Gwich'in instructor, Lillian Garnett. Being able to speak in context and contribute to Gwich'in discourse meant that I had to have a copious amount of practice. Without belittling me, she always kindly used humor and recast to correct my speech. I felt comfortable and safe around her to make mistakes. Making mistakes when learning a language is part of the process of learning, and I was willing to try to speak. Other members of the Gwich'in community were not so generous with their encouragement. Once, a person told me that I should just speak English because my speaking ability was so bad that she grew impatient. Despite this type of comment, I persisted, and have reached proficiency levels for speaking, listening, writing, and reading that are advanced mid-level to advanced high

levels. This is sufficient to be the Gwich'in language instructor at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Language, Culture, and Identity

Culture and identity are connected in complex ways, and language use is an important element for both. Within the Gwich'in group, there are many examples of activities and ideas which are a big part of the culture. These cultural activities have been passed on to succeeding generations, and are accepted by Gwich'in people as the norm. It is the very essence of knowledge of these activities that creates an identity for Gwich'in individuals who are involved in such activities. For example, Gwich'in hunt for moose during the fall season to provide food for their families throughout the winter months, and like generations before them, make use of most of the animal. This means that there are roles for both men and women in the care and preparation of the moose. When hunting for moose, men know the different ages of moose, their habitat, and also know which ones are desirable for consumption. Women use the hides for making traditional clothing such as moccasins, dresses, vests, mittens, etc. (Gwich'in Renewable Resource Board, 1997). Historically, this was all done in the Gwich'in language but with time and historical developments related to contact, this language has shifted into the use of English, and now the younger generations of hunters can only use English as they hunt for moose. Although the relationship between culture and identity is important to many Indigenous people, it can simultaneously lead to marginalization of non-speakers of the language.

If culture and identity are connected in complex ways, the same can be said for culture and language. The community can play a central role for language learning to take place, but this is dependent on the goals of language learners and their actions. "Being Gwich'in" can manifest

itself in many ways through language knowledge. It can open doors that create understanding, which in turn leads to new identities.

Limitations

This study was conducted by interviewing eleven Gwich'in people to try to understand their feelings and thoughts about ancestral language learning and identity. Participants graciously allowed me to ask questions about language and Gwich'in identity. Each participant has a different story to tell; their histories are different and individualized, and some have provided more information than others. Therefore, the information represented here cannot be representative and generalizable, but hopefully the study can be transferable to other Indigenous groups and helpful to learners, teachers and communities.

This chapter has provided a lens into the intent of this study; gaining insight into language learning and identity.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The central focus of this research is how identity may be linked to learning the Gwich'in language, an endangered Indigenous language. The big questions research on identity tries to answer include (1) Who are we?; (2) What factors make us who we are? Is it our genes? Is it nature? Is it our culture? Is it our language? In addition, there are tensions that exists within the discussion of identity, i.e. stability vs. fluidity; static vs. dynamic; physical vs. mental; individual vs. social; similarity vs. difference; delimited vs. unbound, etc.

This chapter will discuss a number of ways researchers have suggested for how identity relates to second language acquisition, namely poststructural definitions of identity (including subjectivity and positioning) and language and second language identity (including investment), Finally, the concept of self as a leading activity is proposed as a useful way to integrate identity into an activity theoretical framework.

Poststructural Definitions of Identity

According to Block (2007), the study of identity is often influenced by a strong form of biological determination where "individuals are what their genes make them" (Block, 2007, p. 11). This includes physical characteristics, such as hair color, skin color, facial features, stature, etc. Following this view of identity, individuals were grouped together based on these traits. This approach to identity is based on essentialism (Ang, Chalmers, Law & Thomas, 2000; Block, 2007; Omoniyi & White, 2006), and views identity as static or unchanging. When applied to groups, essentialism examines shared biological and cultural structures, and views them into one homogeneous entity. Bucholtz (2003) explains essentialism as:

> the position that the attributes and behavior of socially defined groups can be determined and explained by reference to cultural and/or biological

> characteristics believed to be inherent to the group. As an ideology, essentialism rests on two assumptions: (1) that groups can be clearly delimited; and (2) that group members are more or less alike. (p. 400)

More succinctly, essentialism is the belief in "invariable and fixed properties which define the 'whatness' of a given entity." (Fuss, 1989, p. xi). By this definition, Gwich'in people could be identified through the color of their skin, eyes, hair, etc. In terms of social structure, Gwich'in people could be identified as Gwich'in if they have, for example, traditional caribou clothing and live a subsistence lifestyle. This concept of a Gwich'in identity is based on the assumption that all Gwich'in people share these characteristics, and that they are what identifies them as Gwich'in.

This static view of identity is clearly too simplistic and has been challenged by poststructural approaches to identity. Researchers from the social sciences, within the framework of postructuralism, have rejected the ideology of homogeneity within boundaries. As Swann, Deumert, Lillis and Mesthrie (2004) explain:

> poststructuralist approaches emphasise the following: (a) change and fluidity rather than stability as a general principle; (b) the indeterminacy of meaning in language, that is the impossibility of fixing meanings in any straightforward way as these will vary not least according to context and participants; (c) the individual as constantly in process, rather than a stable or fixed entity, which is captured in the term SUBJECTIVITY." (p. 247, emphasis in original)

Based on the above definition of identity, an individual's identity can go through many changes. Identity depends on goals and interaction with other people in a social context.

Following this view, then, to be Gwich'in is not the same thing for every person. Being Gwich'in is not fixed and how individuals enact their identity depends on your relations with others and on the setting. In this sense, individuals are enacting multiple identities and an individual's identities are constantly developing and changing. Two important concepts within a poststructural view of identity are subjectivity and positioning; each is discussed below.

Subjectivity.

In defining identity Swann et al (2004), emphasized the term subjectivity, to highlight the individual's role in identify construction. Other researchers also draw on the term subjectivity (Bammer, 1994; Block, 2007; Canagarajah, 1999; Norton, 2000) in capturing the complexities of what constitutes identity. Weedon (1997) defines subjectivity as "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation in the world." (p. 32). She further explains that the subjective self is "precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak" (Weedon, p. 33).

In order to illustrate the "contradictory" nature of identity, Weedon discusses how mothers are constructed by society at large as being nurturing, loving, and caring. This sets expectations for how individual mothers are supposed to feel and act. However, there are undoubtedly times in any mother's life when she feels overwhelmed and does not have these types of positive feelings or does not exhibit the expected behavior. The mother might feel guilty and confused about her feelings even though they are not unusual, because they are in conflict with the norm of society. The Merriam Webster dictionary defines precarious as (1) "depending on the will or pleasure of another", and (2) "dependent on chance circumstances, unknown conditions, or uncertain developments" (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/precarious,

retrieved December 6, 2012). The identity of a mother is similar to the identity of a person learning Gwich'in. As we learn the Gwich'in language, we expect to be supported, encouraged, and nurtured by other speakers of the language, but oftentimes, none of these actions are present. Gwich'in learners are at the mercy of other speakers, and one never knows what to expect and therefore a precarious situation for those who have a desire to learn the language. Gwich'in language learners' subjectivity relates back to the quote by Weedon, in which she says "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual" are what individuals consciously do for language learning. When I first began to learn my ancestral language, I was consciously aware that I was taking steps to learn and practice the language in order to attain a level of proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening Gwich'in. Once I learn various topics in the language, and use that language all the time, it then becomes unconscious thought. Undoubtedly, during the conscious thought process, there may be obstacles that present themselves. For instance, when researching Gwich'in knowledge, the information may not be available. This is where having to depend on other speakers can become precarious because they may or may not want to provide an answer. In this sense, it is contradictory

Identity, as it relates to Gwich'in language learning is *precarious* because second language learners are subject to what speakers may say to them. When trying to use Gwich'in with elders or others more proficient in the language, language learners might receive praise or ridicule. If language learners receive praise, then it makes them feel good. This good feeling will keep them on their quest to continue learning and using the language whenever and wherever they are able to. However, if they receive ridicule in the form of pernicious laughter or remarks that are unfavorable, then there is a great likelihood that the learners experience shame and

humiliation because of not being "proficient enough", as indicated by using the wrong dialect, incorrect word order, wrong conjugation or mispronouncing words or phrases.

Most Gwich'in would agree that they have the desire for the younger generation to learn the language and culture. Causing Gwich'in language learners to feel shame and humiliation for trying to use the language with others is *contradictory* to these stated goals. In this way, Gwich'in language learners are caught between contradictory expectations: "Learn Gwich'in" on the one hand "Don't make mistakes" on the other hand.

The *process* of language learning identity is not static, rather it is a dynamic process because no matter how much we learn our language, there is always more to be learned, therefore the process is never done. Language learning identity occurs through interaction and discourse with others in the environment, which means that thinking and speaking are essential requirements.

Weedon tells us that identity is "*constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak"*. This means that every time we think or speak, identity is being shaped and reshaped. Every individual, is part of discourse communities, and each time a language learner speaks with different people in different contexts, our identity is reformed through the discourse that occurs. Similarly, even thinking, draws on prior interaction with those around us. Cognition is a direct result of social interactions, which were internalized through others. This discussion illustrates the importance both of the role of the individual's thoughts and actions, as well as the actions and words of others in identity formation. This is closely related to the concept of positioning, which is discussed below.

Positioning.

As discussed by Weedon in her definition of subjectivity, language and its use in interactions with members of an individual's various speech communities plays a crucial role in shaping in individual's identity. This process is further investigated by Omoniyi and White (2006) who are interested in the sociolinguistics of identity, which they define as focusing:

> on the ways in which people position or construct themselves and are positioned or constructed by others in socio-cultural situations through the instrumentality of language and with reference to all those variables that are identity markers for each society in the speech of its members. (Omoniyi & White 2006, p. 1).

Language then, acts as a catalyst and mediator of how people behave and are viewed in society and is largely dependent on the social situations in which they participate.

In order to understand what Omoniyi and White mean, I will provide a personal vignette about meeting another Gwich'in person—I will call Mariah—in a public place such as a store.

> Mariah and I are from the same generation; we both grew up not knowing how to speak our Gwich'in language but heard it being spoken in our childhood communities. The store, however, is a place where English is spoken in this society. Speaking Gwich'in in this English space marks our identity as Gwich'in people. Some variables that immediately present themselves on my part are (1) that I am not sure how much of the language Mariah knows; (2) that both of us have grown up in a Gwich'in environment or culture; (3) that humor plays an integral role in our interaction; (4) that Mariah may already know formulaic phrases which she had heard growing up, and (5) that I have learned Gwich'in as a second language. Variables that Mariah may have are (1) that she knows that I

am a Gwich'in language instructor at the university; (2) that she is a latent speaker; (3) that she wants to learn to speak Gwich'in and/or (4) that she is proud to be Gwich'in through what she expresses. The way I position myself is to be cautious because I do not want Mariah to feel bad if she does not know how to speak the language, so I ask slowly "neenjit dôonch'yaa?" (how are you?), and she positions herself by answering either in English or in Gwich'in. In this instance, Mariah answers "sheenjit gwinzįį. nan ąįį yù'?" (I'm fine. how about you?). This is as far as I go in positioning myself as a Gwich'in speaker because I can tell that speaking Gwich'in makes Mariah uncomfortable. We reposition ourselves as having a shared cultural history but conduct this interaction in English because of her lack of ability to speak the language. The things we may talk about are events in our village or family members. Invariably we both laugh so hard that tears are coming down our eyes, and then we say our goodbyes but use Gwich'in again. Since this was a positive experience for both of us, in subsequent encounters, I assist Mariah if she asks "how do we say" this or that in Gwich'in. This is significant on Mariah's positioning because it shows that she is definitely interested, and in doing so, is positioning me as a Gwich'in instructor or more knowledgeable peer in terms of the Gwich'in language. Mariah has become more comfortable around me, and has even asked to join my university language class.

The example above shows how we position and reposition ourselves in conjunction with norms of society, such as the language used and the topic(s) chosen, thereby negotiating our identities and relationship.

While poststructuralist views of identity emphasize the role of language in identity, the researchers discussed so far have not attempted to understand identity in relation to speaking a particular language or the process of learning additional languages.

Language identity.

Block (2007) defines the term language identity as follows:

> Language identity may be understood as the assumed and/or attributed relationship between one's sense of self and means of communication which might be known as a language (e.g. English) a dialect (Geordie) or a sociolect of relationship with such means of communication. (p. 40)

According to Block's definition of language identity, communication is key to a sense of self. Calderwood (1999) makes this same case, in stating that an individual's sense of self can be "accomplished through the use of symbolic means such as language." (p. 24).

It seems intuitively convincing that identity and language are related. How we speak or communicate positions us. We change our language to fit particular contexts and others make judgments about not only what we say but also which language we use and how we use that language. Similarly, Norton (1997) states that, most researchers agree that "identity constructs and is constructed by language." (p. 419). Following this argument, speaking the Gwich'in language is one key construct of Gwich'in identity.

Language use can be interlinked with how an individual sees herself in relation to a social group. Leung, Harris and Rampton (1997) identify the following three elements that shape this relationship: *language expertise, language inheritance,* and *language affiliation.* They explain that:

> *language expertise* refers to how proficient people are in a language; *language affiliation* refers to the attachment or identification they feel for a language whether or not they nominally belong to the social group customarily associated with it; and *language inheritance* refers to the ways in which individuals can be born into a language tradition that is prominent within the family and community setting whether or not they claim expertise in or affiliation to that language (p. 555)

As far as proficiency in the Gwich'in language, or what Rampton terms *language expertise,* I am probably accepted by other Gwich'in speakers because they can understand what I am trying to communicate. To me, my language expertise is an important part of my identity. With my own experience in *language affiliation,* I have a strong feeling of affiliation with the Gwich'in language and have a positive attitude about learning it. Within the Gwich'in community, there is a strong sense of affiliation to the Gwich'in language even for those who do not speak the language. Finally, in relation to *language inheritance,* for me being born to parents who spoke Gwich'in did not mean that I had *language expertise* or that I have always had a positive Gwich'in *language affiliation.* For me, language expertise developed over time, but for various reasons, this is not the case for all people who are Gwich'in. My own language learning experience is an example that it is never too late to learn the language. This illustrates that as time moves in a person's lifespan, language identities can change in relation to these three elements, shaping and shaped both by a sense of self and by changing social circumstances.

Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) refer to language identity as "acts of identity". In their view, identity is multidimensional simultaneously drawing on other factors such as

ethnicity, nationality, gender or social class. Jones and McEwen (2000) define a conceptual model of multiple dimensions of identity as depicting:

> a core sense of self or one's personal identity. Intersecting circles surrounding the core identity represent significant identity dimensions and contextual influences (e.g., family background and life experiences). (p. 405)

Based on this foundation of internal identity or personal identity and external forces, language identity can be represented as multiple dimensions in Figure 2.1 below.

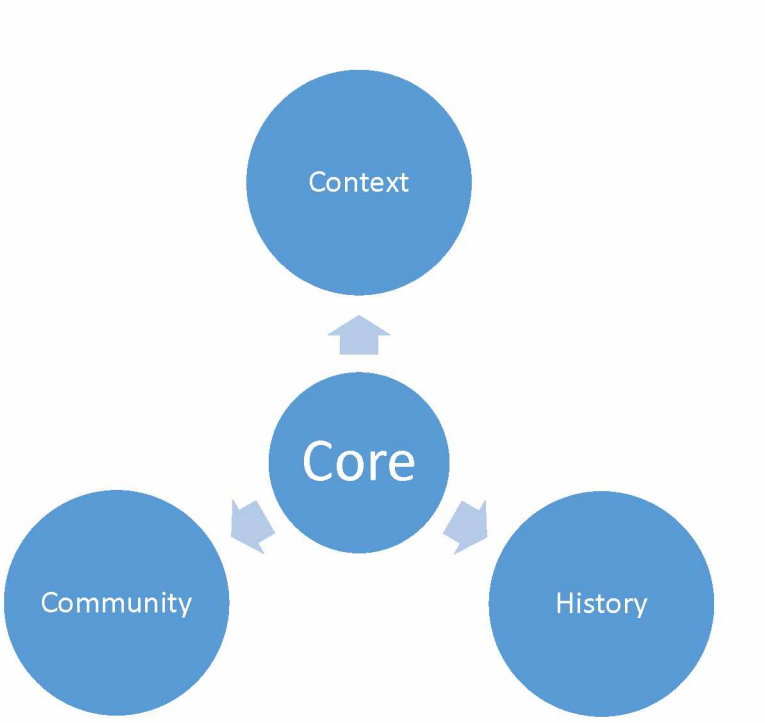

Figure 2.1. Multiple dimensions of identity adapted from Jones and McEwen (2000).

Figure 2.1 represents the core, which is the person's attributes, characteristics, and identity. The core is affected by the context which is the person's background, sociocultural conditions, and experiences (Jones & McEwen, 2000). If the goal is Gwich'in language learning, one needs to take into consideration all of these dimensions of identity.

Jones and McEwen's model projects an overall model of being multidimensional, but identities also are based on a person's affiliation with a particular group. These types of identities are discussed by Block (2007), as in Table (2.1).

Table 2.1: Individual/Collective Identity Types

Ascription/affiliation	**Based on**
Ethnic identity	shared history; descent, belief systems, practices, language and religion, all associated with a cultural group
Racial identity	socially contrived ideas of biological/genetic make-up, i.e. racial phenotype.
National identity	shared history, descent, belief systems, practices, language and religion associated with a nation state
Migrant identity	ways of living in a new country, on a scale ranging from classic immigrant to transmigrant
Gender identity	nature of conformity to socially constructed notions of femininities and masculinities, as well as orientations to sexuality and sexual activity
Social class identity	income level, occupation, education and symbolic behaviour
Language identity	relationship between one's sense of self and different means of communication, understood in terms of language, a dialect or sociolect, as well as multimodality.

(Block, 2007, p. 43)

Within this definition of identity, a Gwich'in person learning their ancestral language may go through many different experiences. Some experiences for Gwich'in language learning may be positive, while others not so positive. A lot of these experiences will depend on how the individual goes about learning their language, and the many variables they may encounter in their interactions with others. These experiences can be framed within the concept of investment.

Second language identities and investment.

The literature reviewed in this section looks specifically at the relationship between learning a second language and identity through the concept of investment. Norton (1997) defines investment as follows: "The construct of investment conceives of the language learner as having a complex history and multiple desires. An investment in the target language is also an

investment in a learner's own social identity, which changes across time and space" (p. 411). Investment dispels the notions of good or bad learner, motivated or not motivated learner, etc., but instead addresses favorable or unfavorable conditions for language learning to occur (Darvin & Norton, 2015). The idea of desire to learn the language (or a choice in the matter) depends, in part, on relationships with other speakers or language learners (Morgan, 2004). Investment provides a lens to see the relationships of power in learning environments, which then shapes a learner's commitment to language learning. Power, as stated by Darvin and Norton (2015) are "material conditions that allow learning to take place, and how learners, inscribed by race, ethnicity, gender, social class, and sexual orientation are accorded or refused the right to speak." Furthermore, these "conditions of power in different learning contexts can position the learners in multiple and often unequal ways, leading to varying learning outcomes" (p. 37). Understanding these power relations can be beneficial for language learners.

A model of investment seeks to explain identity through the "socially and historically constructed relationship between language learner identity and learning commitment (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 37). This learning commitment then results in symbolic and economic capital gain. Darvin and Norton draw on the work of Bourdieu to explain the notion of capital and its role in investment. Bourdieu (1987) defines various capital as power, which include:

> firstly *economic* capital, in its various kinds; secondly *cultural* capital or better, informational capital, again in its different kinds; and thirdly two forms of capital that are very strongly correlated, *social* capital, which consists of resources based on connections and group membership, and *symbolic* capital, which is the form the different types of capital take once they are perceived and recognized as legitimate. (p. 4) [Emphasis in original.]

An example of economic capital is demonstrated in Messing (2009). Her study is on Mexicano youth and their ambivalence about using their ancestral language in light of global influences, especially regarding education and employment which affects their social identities.

Along with identity and capital, investment also includes ideology. The idea of ideology is used in a broader context, which Darvin and Norton (2015) see as a set of normative ideas. The authors draw on Bourdieu (1987) that these normative ideas are constructed by symbolic or world-making power. Ideology can appear to be common sense, but ideology can also be deliberately hidden. However, being aware of how ideology works for communication, and also understanding how these powers bar entry into language learning creates space to analyze the role of ideology in investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015, 2016).

Regarding language ideology, Field (2009) compares two time periods of the twentieth century of Navajo language ideologies and language use. Field found that Navajo language use and language ideology has changed dramatically due to bilingualism and English-dominant speakers, resulting in borrowings from English that result in codemixing. Through the lens of socialization ideologies, Bunte (2009) triangulates language, identity, and traditional socialization ideologies and practices which provides the basis for language shift among the Paiute. Bunte found that there is a strong link between language and identity, and that language socialization and language revitalization are interlinked. When the Paiute adults teach children, they are given advice, rather than given orders, and that this type of behavior extends to language learning. This behavior creates challenges for Paiute language revitalization. Following is an example of investment for Gwich'in language learning.

Investment and identity.

Before I learned my ancestral language, Gwich'in, I still identified as a Gwich'in person because I grew up in the culture and also understood the language. As I invested my time to learn to speak, read, and write Gwich'in, my identity changed through a deeper understanding of the language. In the broader social world of the Gwich'in community, and with other Indigenous groups, my relationships expanded to share how I had learned Gwich'in as an adult. I have been very committed to learning Gwich'in, and have been doing this for over 18 years.

Investment and capital.

Once I learned to speak, read, and write Gwich'in, I gained symbolic and economic capital. Learning Gwich'in provided me with symbolic capital in that the language is valued enough to be learned. Gwich'in is an endangered language that is not being learned, but because of my commitment to learning the language, it is now being taught at the university to students who are Gwich'in and others throughout the world. In addition, there is a small group of Gwich'in language learners who are beginning to revitalize the language. Through economic capital, learning Gwich'in made it possible for me to earn a living by teaching at the university.

Investment and ideology.

Darvin and Norton (2015) state that "ideologies are dominant ways of thinking that organize and stabilize societies while simultaneously determining modes of inclusion and exclusion, and the privileging and marginalization of ideas, people, and relations (p. 44). For Gwich'in language learners, the ideology from other speakers is that we need to learn the language, but at the same time, these same speakers provide no positive support. As Gwich'in language learners, our speech may be far from perfect, and we are criticized for trying to speak or ask questions. Some of the current speakers of Gwich'in never had to learn their ancestral

language because Gwich'in is their L1. As they were growing up, they had to learn English, so their experiences in learning English should be a reminder of what it is like to learn another language. Perhaps the experience of learning English was not a good one, and this carries on in their attitude about learning Gwich'in. Whatever the reasons are for these attitudes for learning Gwich'in are, they need to be recognized in order to experience a safe language learning environment.

The above demonstrates my investment for Gwich'in language learning through the constructs of language identity, capital, and ideology. Each of the constructs inform the other, and overlap. Identity allows me to position myself as a Gwich'in language learner, and the more of the language that I learn, I gain both symbolic and economic capital. These two constructs take place within the background of language learning ideology, which can affect the learning outcome. The next section will cover Indigenous language learning and identity.

Indigenous Language Learning and Identity

Nicholas (2008) grounds identity in "a Hopi theory of life" (p. 26), which is validated by her Hopi mentor and committee member Emory Sekaquaptewa. In later research with youth, Nicholas (2009) contends that even though some Hopi youth do not know their language, they still have a strong cultural identity which is expressed through "language as cultural practice…" (p. 322). These cultural practices are enacted by the Hopi youth in planting corn, Hopi religious practices, social dances, songs, and ceremonies.

Lee (2009) grounds her work on deconstruction of language, identity and power to understand the sense of self with Navajo and Pueblo youth. The way in which Lee deconstructs the concepts of language, identity and power was through the use of counter-narratives of Navajo teens and reflection papers of Navajo and Pueblo college students. These counter-narratives were

gathered from youth through interviews and reflective writings, in which the youth expressed their "concerns, values, frustrations, celebrations, and dilemmas with regard to their heritage language and identity" (p. 307). These counter narratives countered the dominant society or their own Native community. Although both Nicholas's and Lee's research are with youth, their findings provide a promising foundation for language and identity.

Several important points that they make will be discussed regarding Indigenous language learning and identity. The first, is that awareness of language shift and change is an essential element to foster language use. In fact the authors argue that if communities are not aware that language shift is taking place, it will be a threat to Indigenous communities. Students' responses to Native language shift and change indicate that many discussions need to take place on many levels within a community from individuals to institutions in order to address language shift and change so that there is language use. The second is to realize what the effects of the dominant society has on communities and families for language use. The authors found that the dominant language (English) is seen as progress and the non-dominant language (Indigenous) is seen as a relic of the past and disappearing, and as a result, the Native language is hardly used by families. The third point is that Indigenous language learners should possess a sense of identity even if the Native language is not well spoken. Nicholas and Lee point out that even though some of their participants did not speak their respective languages well, they still felt a strong sense of their identity as either Hopi, Navajo or Pueblo because of their participation in cultural practices such as dances, ceremonies, bread making, or farming. Finally, language learners should use agency to learn their ancestral language by making personal choices through cultural and linguistic steps. For this study, in the dimensions of ancestral language learning, it will be crucial to address some

of these ideas, such as sense of identity even if the language is not spoken well and agency by language learners.

Self as a leading activity forms the final theoretical foundation for this research and is discussed in the next section.

Self as a Leading Activity

The conceptualizations of identity discussed so far have been grounded in poststructuralism (subjectivity), feminist studies (positioning), sociolinguistics (language identity) and critical theory (investment). Self as a leading activity rests on the tenets of sociocultural theory. Some key concepts of sociocultural theory, will be briefly discussed before exploring self as a leading activity in relation to second language learning.

Sociocultural theory overview.

Sociocultural theory is a "theory about how humans think through the creation and use of mediating tools" (Swain, Kinnear, & Steinman, 2011, p. x). Sociocultural theory was originally conceived by Vygotsky (1978) to understand the relation between learning and development. Vygotsky's research inspired other researchers, such as Lantolf and Thorne (2006), Wink and Putney (2002), Roth and Lee (2007) and others, to extend sociocultural theory into language acquisition. The domains of sociocultural theory are (1) phylogenesis; (2) sociocultural history; (3) ontogenesis, and (4) microgenesis (Wertsch, 1985). Phylogenesis is a domain that investigates how human thinking came to evolve through mediation over time, as opposed to other species, such as apes or chimpanzees (Lantolf, 2000). Based on Wolfgang Köhler's research on the use of tools by chimpanzees and gorillas, Vygotsky hypothesized that although primates and humans displayed the capacity to think and use tools, humans were unique in that they were able to adapt socially for labor to be organized. Marxism claims that it is this

organized labor specifically, that allowed humans to transform as a species. Vygotsky's added contribution in the realm of phylogenesis was in theorizing that the use of symbolic tools as the means for developing higher mental functions was unique to humans (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

Sociocultural history describes how groups of humans develop culture through transmitting and adapting knowledge and tools from generation to generation. The sociocultural domain places an individual in the context of his or her "collective, material, and historical conditions" (Thorne, 2000, p. 225). Development and learning is mediated by cultural artifacts and symbolic sign systems, such as language (Thorne, 2000). To place this in a Gwich'in perspective, Gwich'in culture has developed over generations through intergenerational transmission. The Gwich'in language has been an important tool to teach about Gwich'in values and practices for generations past. The disruption of intergenerational transmission of Gwich'in language also impacts, to some extent, the intergenerational transmission of Gwich'in epistemology. The use of sociocultural history to understand the history of Gwich'in people and culture with respect to language, and how it impacts individual Gwich'in language learners, will be useful.

Ontogenesis is a domain that describes natural and cultural development over the lifespan of an individual. As a young child, an individual is almost entirely dependent on others that surround them. Lantolf and Appel (1994) describe the early stages of ontogenesis as:

> the child is completely dependent on other people, usually the parents, who initiate the child's acting by instructing the child in what to do, how to do it, and what not to do. Parents, as representatives of the culture, and the conduit through which the culture passes onto the child, actualize these instructions primarily by talking to their offspring. (p. 9)

Language learning, then, is an integral part of a person's ontogeny. However, if the parents do not speak their ancestral language, they have no way of transmitting this to their offspring. The ability to think and control one's own mental processes emerges as the individual matures. It is this process, which the ontogenetic domain seeks to understand and explain. Ontogenesis is important to this study because it provides an opportunity to include the history of an individual, which shapes their identity. At any time in a person's life, their ontogenesis can change so that a different identity is created. If a Gwich'in individual has a desire to learn their ancestral language, learning the language will change their identity and history.

Microgenesis is a domain in which developmental changes for learning "a word, sound, or grammatical feature of a language" (Lantolf, 2000, p. 3) happen over a short amount of time. Microgenesis is concerned with the moment-to-moment development during social interactions. The role of developmental change for Gwich'in second language learners provides an opportunity to demonstrate that language learning is taking place. When language learning takes place through social interaction, microgenesis takes place, and affects the learners' identity.

Sociocultural theory is important because Vygotsky viewed language as the "tool of the tools". It is through language, which is a symbolic tool, that humans mediate their social interactions. Mediation is the connection into an activity that links humans to their world. Symbolic tools, such as language, make it possible for people to "organize and maintain control over the self and its mental, and even physical, activity" (Lantolf, 1994, p. 418). This is an important concept for this research because language is at the heart of identity. Sociocultural theory is closely tied to another theory called activity theory. Other names for Activity Theory are Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and Sociocultural Theory (SCT). SCT is the foundation for Activity Theory and CHAT (Fleer, 2016). Lantolf and Thorne (2006) provide a

history of activity theory, which has its roots in Soviet psychology through researchers such as L. S. Vygotsky and A. N. Leont'ev. At the present time, Y. Engeström has made extensive contributions to activity theory.

Activity Theory

Kutti (1996) characterizes activity theory as "a philosophical and cross-disciplinary framework for studying different kinds of human practices as development processes, with both individual and social levels interlinked at the same time" (p. 25). Therefore, Activity Theory uses include a multitude of different situations that consider the social and historical development of a phenomenon, including language learning or teaching. The meaning of activity in English does not fully convey what is meant by *activity* in Activity Theory. Ryle (1999) explains that the activity in Activity Theory is that the "implication is of high-level, motivated thinking, doing and being of an individual in a given social context" (p. 413).

Activity Theory has three distinct periods, each with its own important contributions. These three distinct periods are the contributions of: (1) Vygotsky; (2) Leont'ev, and (3) Engeström. The first time period for activity theory is based on Vygotsky's argument that cognitive and social development are mediated by ideas and culture. Culture, according to Vygotsky is "seen to exist objectively in the world of human artifacts and in the social construction and transformation of the natural environment" (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 211). Mediation is the means of attaining a goal. The process of mediation is illustrated as Vygotsky's basic triangle in Figure 2.2. The subject is the person or group, and the mediating artifact is what helps the person or group achieve their object or goal. For example, if the goal is to learn an ancestral language, then the subject is a language learner and the mediating artifact would be the Gwich'in language.

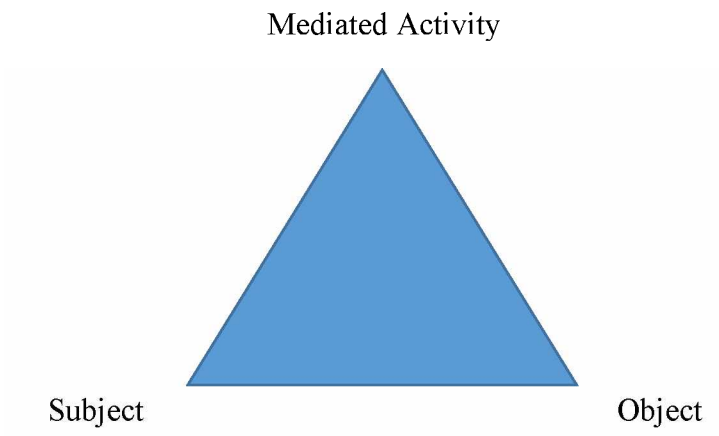

Figure 2.2: Vygotsky's basic triangle (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 54).

The second time period for activity theory is through the work by A. N. Leont'ev, who was a colleague of Vygotsky. Leont'ev perpetuated Vygotsky's idea of cultural mediation but focused on the object or goal, in which he developed a unit of analysis for the activity. The analysis consisted of three parts, which are: (1) the activity itself and the motives that propel it, (2) the actions and affiliated goals, and (3) the operation that provides a way to achieve the goals. As noted in Table 2.1., these three levels answer the questions of why, what, and how (Wertsch, 1985). *Activity* takes place in a social setting, which then generates what subjects do in their roles and goals, and the way they are attained (Lantolf & Appel, 1994). *Setting* "is a sociocultural interpretation or creation that is imposed on the context by the participant(s)" (Wertsch, 1985, p. 203). There is an inseparable link between the activity and *motive*.

Leontiev's concepts of activity, action, and operation are organized into three levels. As depicted by Lantolf and Appel (1994), the levels of activity, action, and operation answer the questions of why, what, and how (see Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: Questions Answered by Activity Theory.

Level	**Underlying Concepts**	**Question being Answered**
Activity	Motive	Why does something take place?
Action	Goal and sub goals	What takes place?
Operation	Conditions	How is it carried out?

The third time period for activity theory, which is at the time of this writing, are contributions from Y. Engeström who builds on Vygotsky's triangle and the notion of activity to also include community, rules, and division of labor. See Figure 2.3 for this expansion.

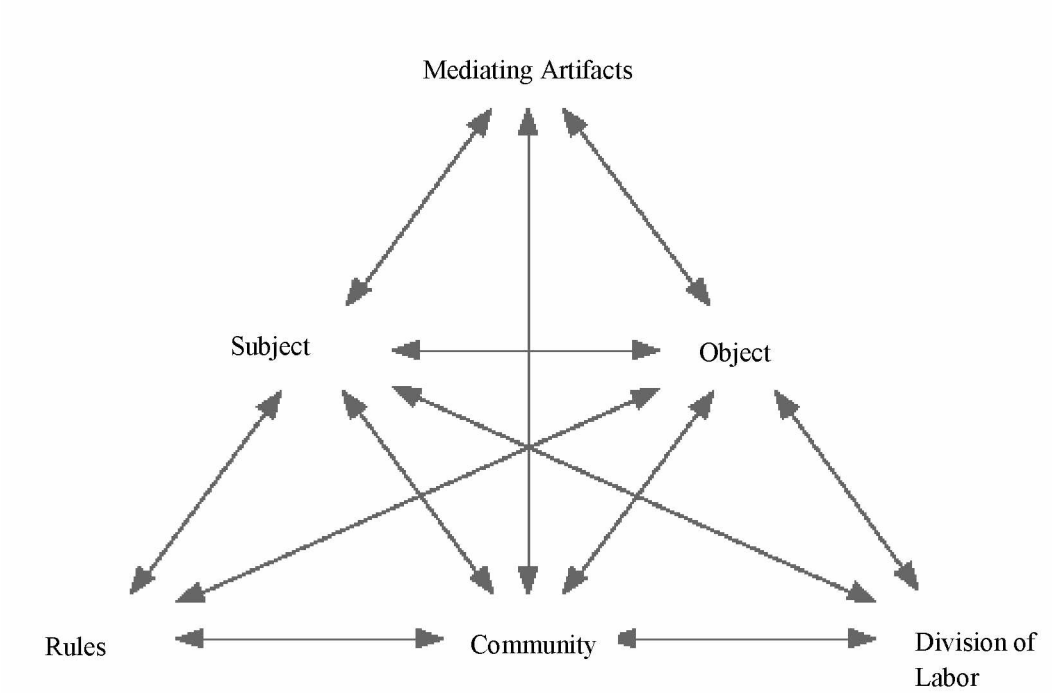

Figure 2.3: Engeström's (1987) Activity Theory Triangle Expanded.

"The community is the social group with which the subject identifies while participating in the activity. The division of labor refers to how the tasks are shared among the community" (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010, p. 23). Adding these elements situates a place and includes other individuals that affect an activity system. Furthermore, when using activity theory to analyze a particular experience, it is essential for the researcher to include themselves as a participant (Yamagata-Lynch, 2003).

Cole and Engeström (1993) applied an activity theory analysis to two situations, which were reading acquisition and work by employing distributed cognition. Distributed cognition is a framework that describes what is occurring in each node of an activity system. In placing the problem of children learning to read in an activity system, two considerations were identified for

cognitive processes to be distributed. The first consideration was among teacher, student, other students, and the cultural or mediating artifacts such as text, blackboard, role playing cards, etc. The second was the expected future state or goal. The future state was the goal of being a mature reader. Once these considerations were identified, they were placed on the activity system. After creating an activity of question-asking-reading sessions for the children, they found that the children's ability were improved in their classrooms and also on state-mandated reading tests (Cole & Engeström, 1993). In the Gwich'in context for language learning, distributed cognition will consider the roles of people, mediating artifacts, and time.

Following Cole and Engeström's steps of applying distributed cognition; these steps will be applied, in a general sense, to the Gwich'in context for beginning Gwich'in language learning in a classroom. The distributed cognition unfolds through these relevant considerations: (1) The cognitive process for language learning will have to involve learners and a Gwich'in language teacher. The cultural artifacts include a classroom. (2) The expected future state, which is based on a rigorous syllabus, would be language speaking proficiency at an ACTFL intermediate low level. These considerations can be placed on an activity system, as follows in Figure 2.4 which shows the goal of instruction.

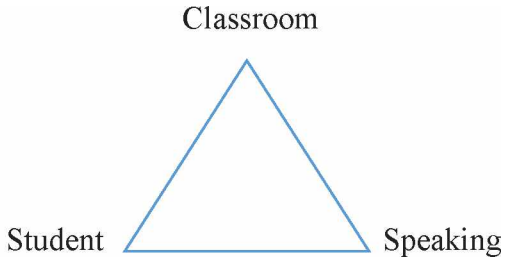

Figure 2.4. Goal of Gwich'in Language Learning, Student-Classroom-Speaking relationship

Figure 2.5 shows step 2 in the analytic strategy where the student is mediated and has to be placed side by side (upright and inverted triangles), and then the teacher is added to the

system. This creates a dual system of mediation for the student by allowing a coordination of the classroom and the teacher for Gwich'in language learning.

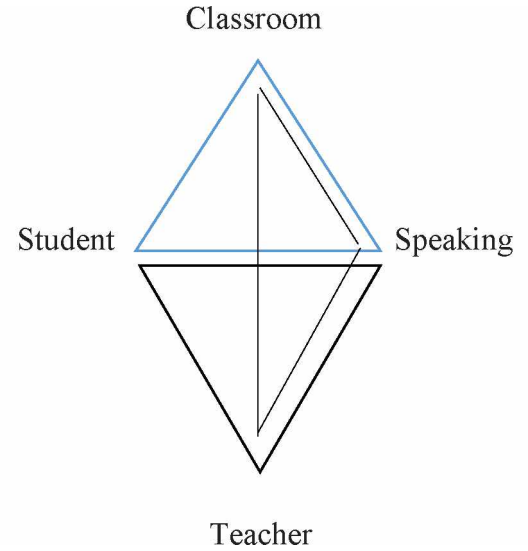

Figure 2.5. Skeletal Structure of Student Mediated by Classroom and Teacher.

Step 3 involves creating the activity and coordinating the relations of the student, classroom, and the teacher. The activity is for the students to learn how to introduce themselves in a culturally-appropriate Gwich'in way. The teacher knows that the students are all beginners in the language, and uses a variety of mediating artifacts, such as oral language (for example, through choral response) and written language (for example, on the whiteboard and on name tags). This language learning activity of learners introducing themselves is depicted in Figure 2.6, which includes specific mediating artifacts, rules, community, and division of labor.

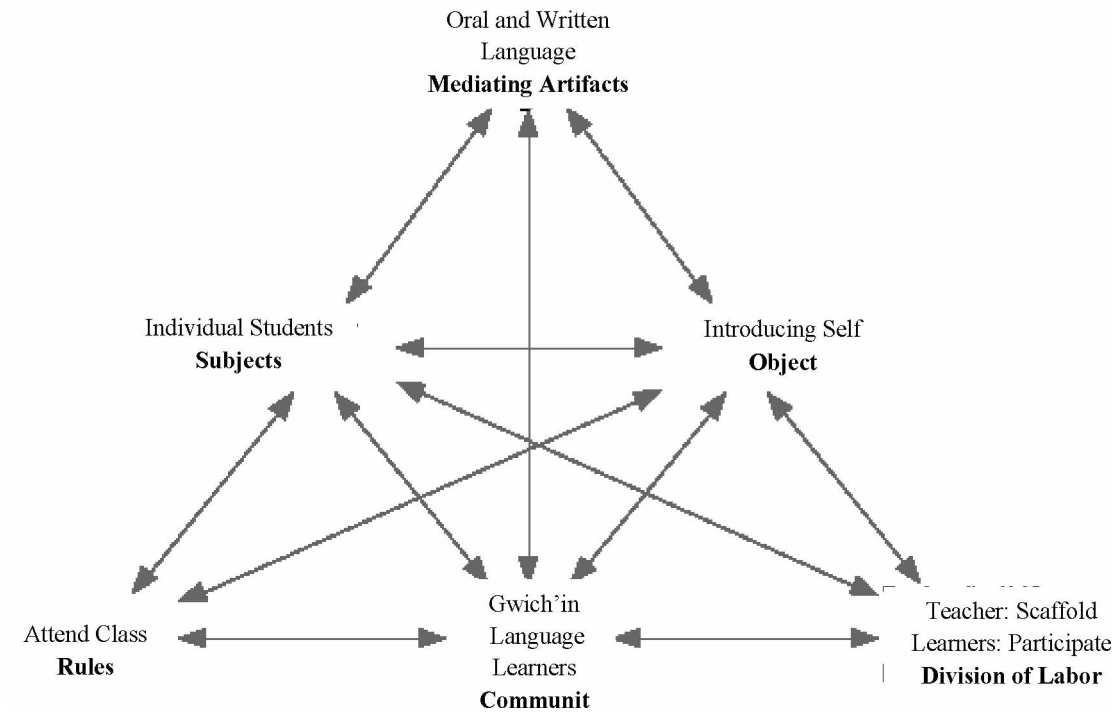

Figure 2.6. Gwich'in Language Lesson in Expanded Activity System Model.

Figure 2.6 is the distributed cognition for a Gwich'in language lesson for a learner to be able to introduce themselves in Gwich'in. Figure 2.7 is a typical one-hour Gwich'in language lesson at the university, where the object is for students to learn: My name is (James). I am from (Venetie). However, there is much more to the language lesson than learning two phrases. Learners have to understand word order and sounds, such as ts' that are not part of their L1, which is usually English. Word order and the sounds of the language are not explicitly taught during this particular lesson. Also, there is no textbook for the class, so the whiteboard is used for those learners who need a visual representation of the language.

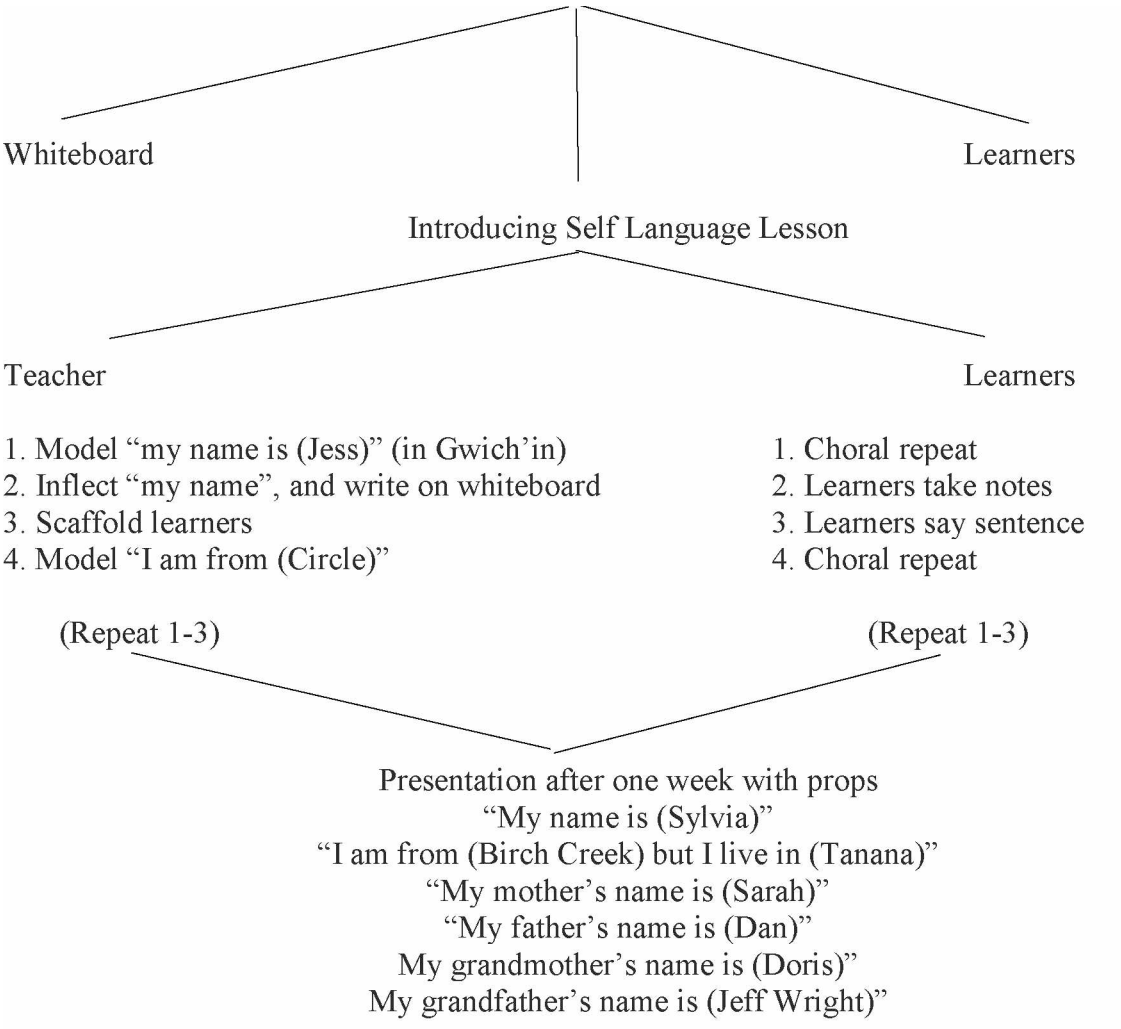

Figure 2.7. Overall Structure of University Gwich'in Language Learning.

There is a lot of group work that involves asking questions and getting used to answering them in the language. Also, nouns are inflected and verbs are conjugated. Each of the one hour lessons involve review, and the lessons are progressive. Repetition also plays a key role that leads to eventual Gwich'in language learning.

Activity theory continues to be developed and is considered multi-voiced in the sense that it includes systems of time and space (Engeström, Engeström & Vähäaho, 1999).

Stetsenko and Arievitch (2004) argue that sociocultural theory needs to be expanded because: (1) of the "one-sided dependence of the self on material production of human life and

associated societal forms of exchanges between people"; (2) social sources are at the expense of individual agency; (3) it does not take into account how individuals go through the process of acquiring culture; and (4) it disregards the development of both individuals and humanity while they constantly create and change culture. This expansion of sociocultural theory to include the self will be discussed in the next section on self as a leading activity.

There is one more component that is of particular interest in an activity system, and it is called Self as a Leading Activity. Stetsenko and Arievitch (2004) describe self as a leading activity as:

> a process of real-life activity that most explicitly positions individuals to meaningfully contribute to the ongoing social collaborative practices in the world. It is a process that connects individuals to the social world around them and serves the purposes of organizing these social connections and ties. The self represents a moment in ongoing social activities that is not stored somewhere in the depths of the human soul, but is constantly re-enacted and constructed by individuals anew in the ever-shifting balances of life. (p. 493)

An example that Stetsenko and Arievitch provide for self as a leading activity is as follows:

> a person whose life happens to completely hinge upon his or her appearance might become personally invested in pursuing 'perfect looks' to the extent of turning this into a leading activity and thus making his or her life into an endless race for beauty and fitness. (p. 494)

Following this logic for Gwich'in language learning, if the goal of an individual is to speak the language becomes their 'leading activity', then that person would spend the rest of his or her life to make the process of language speaking happen.

Self as a leading activity involves the practical relevance of the self in individual and social dimensions which are interrelated in human development. Each of the following points will be discussed as it relates to this research. The self as a leading activity can capture:

1. the view that the self represents a moment in ongoing social activities
2. the self appears as having to do with the world and what the person aims to change and transform in it, sometimes by stifling and resisting change
3. an embodiment of a *meaningful life project* (or of a search and, sometimes, even a lack thereof) that reflects and also organizes the most significant aspects of one's life
4. the self as an activity that brings about and carries out an individual's contributions to the world places the emphasis on the self as value- and commitment-laden
5. the leading role of the self as organizing and directing all other pursuits and activities of a person. (*ibid.* pp. 493-496)

Self as a leading activity encapsulates the above five points. The first point is that representation of the self is a moment in ongoing social activities. These social activities are not static, and are always changing and reconstructed by individuals. Social activities are not without direction, and depend on the motive of an individual (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004). As an individual, approximately 20 years ago, my principle motive was to learn the Gwich'in language. I was an undergraduate student at the time, and through determination, I was able to start learning to speak the Gwich'in language. Over time, and to the present day, I continue to learn to speak and use Gwich'in, and over the years, learning Gwich'in has changed my identity in profound ways. At the moment of this writing, learning and understanding the structure of the Gwich'in language has opened opportunities for me to become the university's Gwich'in language instructor. Being a Gwich'in language instructor who has learned the language puts me

in a position to assist other language learners, and to provide them with language learning tools that are helpful for their own language learning. Some of these language tools are practical, and include learning just enough grammar to understand verb conjugations, being patient, repetition, etc.

The second point is that the self is part of the greater world. As part of the greater world, an individual may see a need for change. By initiating change, an individual may then produce transformation, even in the midst of resistance (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004). When I was hired as the Gwich'in language instructor at the university, there were no teaching materials or curriculum with which to work. When I was hired in 2002, creating a Gwich'in curriculum, daily language lessons, activities, and materials then became part of my leading activity. My self-concept then started to include a teaching role. This contribution of Gwich'in language learning materials are a contribution for change to occur, so that future Gwich'in language teachers, and others who teach Indigenous languages, will have a base from which to work.

The third point for the self is to embrace something that provides meaning in one's life. At times, an individual can search for a meaningful life project, and at other times not make an effort to perform this search. Once an individual discovers their meaningful life's work, their passion creates a path that reflects their activity in what they do and how they organize themselves. Included in activities and organization of the self, are responses to discord in their lives, and how they interpret and contribute to their social environment. The social environment then provides access (or not) to cultural resources. An individual is also subjected to controversy, such as power and contention. Once an individual has found a meaningful life project, they may not know it if they are contributing to society, but whether the person thinks so or not, they do contribute to society, even if in a small way. Navigating the social environment creates a

distinctive identity for each individual (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004). Personally, I took on many identities throughout my life, such as office worker and chef, but what I consider my real calling for a meaningful life project is learning my ancestral language, Gwich'in, as an adult. Learning Gwich'in is a lifelong endeavor, but learning the language was not always an easy path to navigate because the social environment of other Gwich'in made it difficult to learn to speak the language. One way I was able to overcome this interference was to seek out sympathetic speakers with whom I was able to practice speaking and asking questions. Seeking out sympathetic and kind speakers was an effective method that worked well for me. Ultimately, this experience in learning my ancestral language was my contribution to other adults for language learning. Through the process of learning Gwich'in as an adult, this learning experience created a unique identity for me in language learning.

The fourth point of self is for an individual to be moral and to posture commitment to particular goals and ethics. Asserting agency in this way is a positive contribution to social life. Agency, not only includes answers to the past and present times, but also for the future as a contribution to formulate new ideas. Making moral choices is considered an activity because people position themselves in real-life matters (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004). Gwich'in language learning is a real-life matter, and as Gwich'in people, we have a moral obligation to keep our language alive by teaching and learning our language. One way that this can occur is to talk through difficult language learning beliefs, and the historical trauma of generational language loss. Speaking frankly about these issues can create solutions, such as creating a safe language learning environment for Gwich'in language learners. Teaching others the Gwich'in language provides an opportunity for a new identity of which one is proud. Historical trauma of generational language loss addresses the past, which informs the present time. The present

generation of Gwich'in language learners can pave the way for future Gwich'in language learners that include support and encouragement.

Finally, the fifth point of self is that the self is never apart from other parts of life. Instead it is inherent over the span of a person's life, and in fact, percolates through everything that a person does throughout their life (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004). As a Gwich'in language learner, a day never goes by when I do not think or speak the language. Learning Gwich'in is ingrained in my thinking and actions on a daily basis.

The important role of concept of 'self as a leading activity' is that it makes a connection with sociocultural theory and the insertion of self as proposed by Stetsenko and Arievitch, and where "leading" does not necessarily follow but rather drives transformation. This is significant because it supports the concept of what individuals are doing (or not doing) about ancestral language learning.

In addition, self as a leading activity supports the idea of 'positioning' and as part of language learning, how do people use the language with learners and what positions do they play and what do they say?

Finally, self as a leading activity is defined as "…a process of real-life activity that most explicitly positions individuals to meaningfully contribute to the ongoing social collaborative practices in the world" (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004, p. 493). As a Gwich'in language learner or teacher, language learning and teaching are roles that meaningfully contribute to Gwich'in collaborative practices by helping to retain the language, and to understand the epistemology of Gwich'in as a group. For ancestral language learning, self as a leading activity refers to what individuals are actually doing about language use in a meaningful way. If a person's desire to learn the Gwich'in language is part of their leading activity, then learning the Gwich'in language

influences all other aspects of that person's life and is reflected in the actions that person performs. For others, the desire to learn Gwich'in may be present, but if it is not an important part of their leading activity, they may not achieve the goal of language learning because other life decisions take precedence. Figure 2.8 illustrates that language learning is not an important pursuit of an individual as their self as a leading activity. Whereas Figure 2.9 illustrates that language learning is important enough to them so that language learning becomes their main self as a leading activity. Although Figures 2.8 and 2.9 are at opposite ends of the spectrum of self as a leading activity, circumstances in a person's life are dynamic and could change at different times in a person's life.

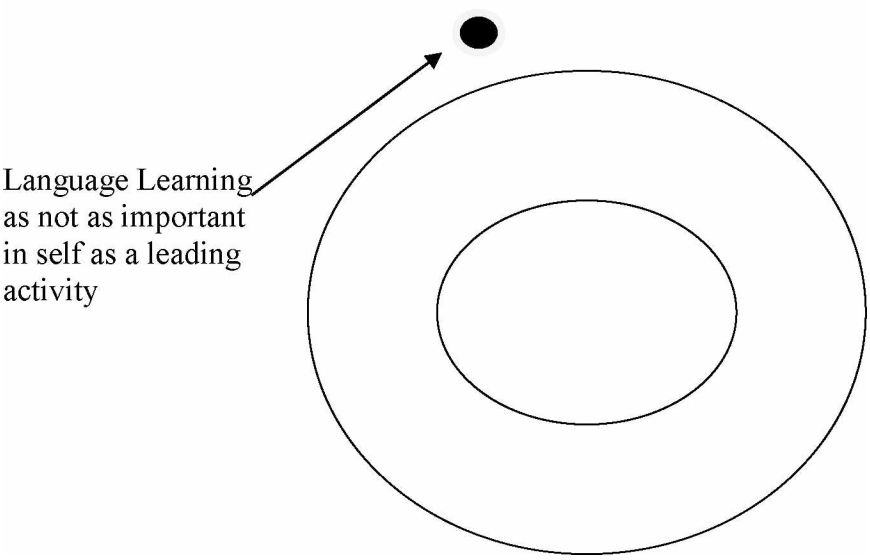

Figure 2.8. Learning not as Important to Self as a Leading Activity

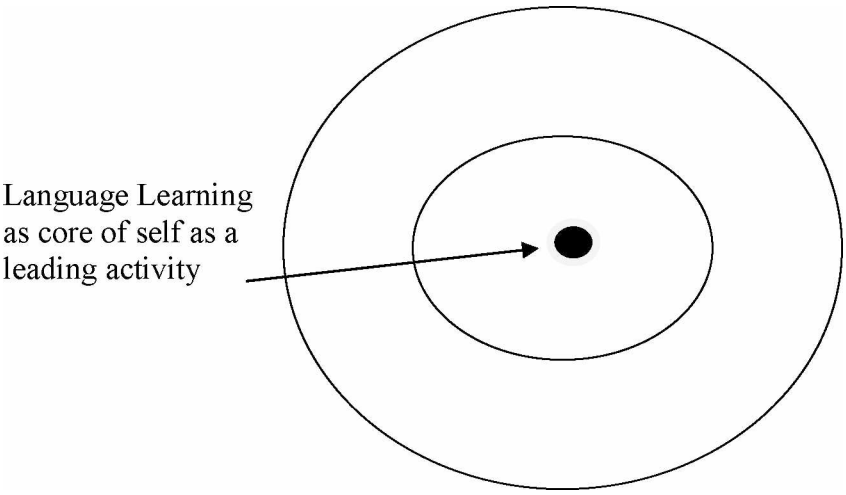

Figure 2.9. Language Learning as Core of Self as a Leading Activity.

Summary

The review of literature has provided a basis for views on identity, which is not static. In particular, the views on language identity reveal that an individual enacts multiple identities, and are constantly developing and changing based on relations with others and their surroundings. Individuals negotiate their identities through positioning and repositioning in conjunction with the norms of society. In light of Gwich'in language learning, investment plays a role, in which considerations for language identity, capital, and ideology are acknowledged. Each of these constructs overlap and complement how an individual positions him or herself. Finally, the self as a leading activity for language learning draws attention to how much time an individual is willing to sacrifice (or not) to reach her goal—in this case, Gwich'in language learning. The following chapter will focus on the methodological aspects of this research as they pertain to language learning and identity.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The research methodology is inextricably tied to the research questions and also the theoretical framework of this study (Mackey & Gass, 2005). The overall goals of this research are to: (1) explore, through my two main participants, how personal and communal factors influence their learning of Gwich'in; (2) determine what language learners can do to learn Gwich'in, and what kinds of community support can or should be provided to encourage their efforts; and (3) investigate how language is a part of "being Gwich'in" according to the Gwich'in participants in this study. These goals are explored through the guiding questions related to what it means to be Gwich'in and how this affects ancestral language learning. The guiding questions are: (a) What are the experiences of ancestral language learners of Gwich'in?; (b) How do Gwich'in ancestral language learners understand these experiences in relation to identity?; and (c) In view of the construction of Gwich'in ancestral language learners' identities, what do participants state about the role of the community?

In order to explore these topics and answer the questions, a qualitative study was conducted based on interviews and observations of two main participants and nine background participants. The two main participants are learners of the Gwich'in language, and so are many of the background participants.

This chapter will include discussion of the research design, positionality and ethics, setting, participants, and procedures for data collection analysis.

Research Design

This research is qualitative in nature because it explores issues of language learning and identity. The goal is to explore the history of learners' lives, and to gain insight into their reflections and stories of themselves and the process they experienced as they are acquiring their

ancestral language. Before the researcher could begin the study, an application and approval were necessary from the UAF Institutional Review Board (Appendix A). Qualitative research is a:

> situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretative, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 10)

This study utilized ethnographic techniques such as interviews and participant observation of individual Gwich'in ancestral language learners as a basis for: (1) identifying Gwich'in ancestral language learners own experiences; (2) identifying when, where, and with whom Gwich'in ancestral language learners use the language; (3) understanding how Gwich'in ancestral language learners experiences relate to cultural and linguistic affiliations as (re)construction of their identity; and (4) understanding Gwich'in ancestral language learners role(s) in their community and the wider Gwich'in communities.

This study follows a qualitative research design (Charmaz, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Miles & Huberman, 1994) through: (1) longitudinal data collection; (2) focusing on an emic perspective; (3) member checks; (4) open-ended data collection; and (5) data analysis through grounded theory.

The left hand column on Table 3.1 is the recurring themes of a qualitative study based on research by Miles and Huberman (1994). The right hand column provides the researchers juxtaposition as justification for her study.

Table 3.1 Characteristics of Qualitative Research

Miles and Huberman's Recurring Themes of Qualitative Study (Adapted from Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 6-7)	**Characteristics Applied to this Research**
Intense or prolonged contact with "field" or life situation, especially with the everyday lives of individuals, groups or societies	Spent the 2010 summer in two Gwich'in villages. Stayed with one participant in one village, and stayed in a friend's house in another, where I also interviewed more participants.
Researcher views the setting and participants holistically to understand the logic, arrangements, explicit and implicit rules	Researcher is part of the culture.
Researcher strives to obtain data from the participant's perceptions by being attentive, showing empathetic understanding, and holding off preconceptions about whatever is being discussed	The interview allowed the interviewees to express their own opinions.
Researcher may discuss themes with the participants for clarification	Once the interviews were transcribed and analyzed, they were discussed with the participants.
Make clear how participants in their settings come to understand, account for, take action, and manage their day-to-day situations	Relationship between language, identity, and actions participants take.
For data analysis, use theory that provides internal consistency	Inquiry sought an explanatory framework in addition to description.
At the outset, there are not that many standardized instrumentation because the researcher is usually the main "measurement device"	The researcher had semi-structured questions, but was also flexible to let the interviewees express themselves.
Most analyses are done with words, which can be placed into themes which allow the researcher to contrast, compare, and analyze	The transcribed interviews were placed into themes, which were then contrasted, compared, and analyzed.

Table 3.1 juxtaposes tenets of a qualitative study with the actions by the researcher. Preparation for the study included formulating semi-structured questions, which were then approved by my committee members. The length of the data collection is over one summer, with validation travel to a small Alaskan village that occurred throughout the year. Since I am Gwich'in who had lived in a Gwich'in village, I had an understanding of how to behave in a culturally appropriate and sensitive way. Once all of the data was collected and transcribed, they were analyzed and placed into themes that reoccurred.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that analyses and trustworthiness of qualitative research (see Table 3.2) depend on the following techniques:

Table 3.2. Summary of Techniques for Establishing Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research

Criterion Area	**Technique**
Credibility	Field activities
	Prolonged engagement
	Persistent observation
	Triangulation (sources, methods, and
	investigators)
	Peer debriefing
	Negative case analysis
	Referential adequacy
	Member checks (in process and terminal)
Transferability	Thick description
Dependability	The dependability audit, including the audit trail
Confirmability	The confirmability audit, including the audit trail
All of the above	The reflexive journal

(pg. 328)

Two important elements of establishing trustworthiness mentioned by Lincoln and Guba (1985) are credibility and transferability.

Credibility

"Credibility refers to the extent to which the results approximate reality and are judged to be trustworthy and reasonable" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 166). The way in which this was accomplished was through prolonged engagement over the summer month of 2010 in the village of Beaver. The prolonged engagement provided an opportunity to be around the participants during this timeframe in order to understand what they were doing as they went about their daily lives. Also, once their interviews were transcribed and analyzed, we scheduled a time to verify and audio record what they had said and what I had interpreted was an accurate representation of their interviews. After a few adjustments, they were incorporated into the data. In addition, the chair of the committee and the author looked at the data for emerging themes. By doing this, the committee chair acted as an interrater which provided a reliability check. In addition, after all of the data was coded, I had the main participants answer any questions I may have had and also had them verify what I had coded. Through these checks and balances, the reality of what the participants imparted was verified as trustworthy and reasonable.

Transferability

Transferability, if applicable to the reader, is made possible by the thick description through the interviews. In the interviews, participants divulged their innermost thoughts and feelings regarding ancestral language learning, what activities they do to learn the language, and how being able to learn, speak, and understand the language made them feel, effectively having an impact on their identity. This thick description, juxtaposed with theories on second language identities, provide the basis for which the reader can base their use of transferability in the context of second language learning identities. Although this particular research is on Indigenous

language learners, the research itself can be cast to other qualitative research in disciplines such as psychology, anthropology or linguistics.

Empirical studies on Indigenous language learning and identity frequently employ qualitative research methods. See for example, Carroll (2010), Margolin (1999), Martinez (2010), Nicholas (2008), Norton (2000), Tamimi Sa'd (2017), and Zummo (2018) which are summarized below in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 Sample of Qualitative Studies in Identity Development

Researcher	Research Topic	Data Collection	Participant(s)	Setting	Analytical Framework
Carroll, J. (2010)	Life history	18 interviews, ½ to 3 hours in length	V. Englishshoe, researcher	Fort Yukon, AK	Dialogic Approach; Emic perspective
Margolin, D. (1999)	Language shift and Identity	8 interviews	Tlingit language policy decision makers, observation	Juneau, AK	Ethnic Identity
Martinez, N. C. (2010)	Culturally relevant pedagogy	(1) Oral histories (video footages); (2) survey; (3) 18 formal interviews; 10 informal interviews (30-90 mins. each); (4) passive observation; (5) participant observations	Students, school personnel, community members	Pueblo Nation	Critical Discourse Analysis
Nicholas, S. (2008)	Hopi cultural and language identity	(1) 11 focused, in-depth, life history interviews (2) Participant observation	Youth; Parent(s); Grandparent(s)	Hopi Nation	Language socialization and Hopi cultural identity; Emic perspective
Norton, B. (2000)	Second language acquisition opportunities and identity	(1) Questionnaire; (2) Interviews; (3) Participant observation; (4) Diary study	Recent immigrants in initial stage of learning English and cultural practices	Ontario Canada	Cultural studies; Feminist research; Critical ethnography
Tamimi Sa'd, S. H. T. (2017)	English language learning and identity reconstruction	(1) Focus-group interviews; (2) Questionnaire	45 intermediate learners of English as a foreign language; all males	Ahwaz, Iran	Language learning and identity (re)construc-tion
Zummo, M. L. (2018)	Discursive identity construction of expats	107 Articles of travel magazines	Expats (living abroad)	Europe	Corpus Linguistics; Self-representation

The above examples of research are qualitative in nature and guided my own research because of their work with people from whom data is collected through observation and/or interviews over an extended period of time (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Commonalities of the above studies indicate uses of: (1) eight to 18 interviews; (2) participant observation, and (3) thematic analysis. In addition, the research topics focus on language and identity which is the topic of this study.

Researcher's Positionality as Insider-Outsider

The goal of this research was to explore the learners' life histories as related to language and culture, and to gain insights into their reflections or stories of themselves and the process of acquiring their ancestral language. Undoubtedly, throughout this dissertation, my voice as the author and researcher is evident because I am also a second language learner, as well as instructor, of my ancestral language, Gwich'in. In addition, I am a community member, a relative of at least one of the participants, and the university language instructor for both of the main participants.

As an Indigenous person who is Gwich'in, but who has not lived in a Gwich'in community for over 30 years, and who is pursuing an advanced academic degree, I need to come to terms with my position both as an outsider, as well as an "insider". Brayboy and Deyhle (2000), both Indigenous researchers, conclude that "those who conduct research must be aware of their positionality in relation to their research participants" (p. 168). Understanding my own positionalities during this research journey is crucial because there may be tensions between being an academic and being a part of one's culture (Brayboy, 1999; Romero-Little, 2003).

Although I had been away from my community for a number of years, I had maintained status as an "insider" because I kept in contact with the Gwich'in community of Fairbanks, and am also knowledgeable about the pragmatics of my culture. This established me as an "insider"

and I was made to feel welcome to the communities in which I did my research, and to also re-establish ties with Gwich'in with whom I had not interacted over some time.

I returned to the communities in the role of a researcher which meant I had to sometimes operate outside of community practices. Some of these included being verbose. Being overly talkative is not normally a part of the culture, especially when I had to ask questions about difficult subjects, or record participants in noisy settings. It was necessary to find the balance between "being a good Indian and a good researcher" (Brayboy, 1999, p. 97). I think my major concern was the participants' perception of me as an academic because of past research by "outsiders" that left bad memories and created mistrust. In my fieldwork though, I found that most of the Gwich'in people were happy to see me make a connection back with them, and that the way I behaved and respected others was appreciated. However, once when I was visiting around in one of the villages, a person that one of my participants and I went to see told her friend that she was visited by "those really smart women". Being a smart person is a trait that most people admire in a person, but the person being labeled that way might feel like they are alienated or set apart. No one wants to have the feeling of being set apart in a culture. Rather, positive social interactions that show respect for others in a social setting is preferred. This other woman was one of my main participants, C.F. She is a much respected and smart woman in her community and is also working on her Ph.D. The feelings this comment invoked in me was a feeling of humbleness because I do not want people to try to avoid me just because of academics. I do have to say that one thing I never did around people in general was to speak about literature reviews or theories, unless I was directly asked. I explained the purpose of my study, and that if they wanted to participate, their information would be confidential if they chose to do so, and as a result, most people were accommodating. Those who wished confidentiality were informed

that a pseudonym would be used, and any information about them, such as their community or employment would be protected. My positionalities impact my understanding that others gain.

Ethical Considerations

There were many additional ethical considerations to take into account as I sought to understand the complex, and sometimes painful topic of language learning and identity of my own people and culture.

For example, I had to take into account was whether to ask all of the participants if they wanted their name and village to be used, and also their current place of residence. Of the fourteen interviews, only two people wanted to remain anonymous, and so their wishes were respected. This idea of anonymity can be a bit complicated due to the fact that the Gwich'in Nation is very small. I was told by some community members that even if people were anonymous, they could easily figure out who those people might be. To counter this, I made the names as generic as possible by using names that are more common in the general public, such as Jones and Smith. In addition, I also made their status of education and occupation vague.

Another question I asked myself was, will I make the interviewees feel uncomfortable with the semi-structured questions? Once, I encountered an interviewee who seemed uncomfortable because of the questions. This particular participant thought that she was answering for all Gwich'in in general, but I was ready for this type of question. I told her that her answers were her own thoughts, and she was not answering for the entire Gwich'in nation. Afterwards she became more comfortable and proceeded to answer all of the questions.

Language choice was another factor when conducting the interviews. Almost all of the participants, except for the older generation, speak English as their first language. Also, some were learning their language and were at different levels of proficiency. The dynamics of which

language to use changed with each participant. Some patterns that emerged are as follows: (1) a few of the younger learners asked me if they had to do the interview in Gwich'in. I could sense that they were clearly uncomfortable, so I told them that they could use any language they wanted, and for the most part, they switched to using English; (2) with the youngest language learners, English was the language used; (3) those who spoke both languages preferred to use English, but my ability to ask in both languages was helpful in some instances, such as when they did not understand the question in Gwich'in, then I switched to English. Conversely, if I asked the question in English, and they did not understand the question, then I was able to switch to Gwich'in. At times, I was unable to ask the question in Gwich'in, so I had to switch to English.

Setting

Alaska is a vast state with varying terrain and has 20 different Indigenous languages. This research will cover only one of these Indigenous, Gwich'in (see Chapter 1 for a description of Alaska's Indigenous languages).

I collected data in two Gwich'in villages—Beaver and Fort Yukon, Alaska and also the city of Fairbanks, which is Alaska's second largest city. The main participants for this study were from Beaver, and as a result, I spent more time there than in Fort Yukon.

Beaver (see Figure 3.1) is situated along the Yukon River, which is the third longest river in North America. It begins in northern British Columbia, and runs through the Yukon Territory, Alaska and ends at the Bering Sea in southwest Alaska (Yukon Info Com, 2012). The only way to reach Beaver is by navigating the Yukon River by boat during the summer and fall months or by air year-round. Supplies such as fuel or big items such as trucks are barged into the village during the summer months, and everything else is brought in by air. Most residents get around

town by using various forms of all-terrain vehicles, motorcycles, mopeds, trucks, or snow machines. A few of the residents still drive dogs outside of the village. Some of the buildings in Beaver are a K-12 school, washateria, post office, Episcopal Church, and a federal/state/tribal government office. There is also a very small store to buy snacks. The homes of most of the residents are either cabins of various sizes or Housing and Urban Development (HUD) frame built homes.

The 2010 census indicated that there were 84 residents who lived in Beaver with the average age of 32 (http://www.city-data.com/city/Beaver-Alaska.html). It is a close-knit community and groups represented by the residents are Gwich'in Athabascan, Koyukon Athabascan, Iñupiaq Eskimo and Japanese. The main sources for jobs are the school, government offices, post office, utilities or the one airline that delivers supplies throughout the year. Sometimes one person may hold multiple jobs such as the postmaster and airline employee or they would cover for each other if something came up. Like most of Alaska's Native villages, residents also seasonally subsist off the land, meaning that they hunt for moose, bear, ducks, geese, muskrats, beaver, and also fish. During the summer months, some residents have big gardens and also pick berries to store for the winter (Alaska Community Database Community Information Summaries, 2010).

Fort Yukon (Figure 3.1) is situated along the Yukon River, and is one of the largest Gwich'in villages in Alaska; therefore, there are more residents, airlines, employment opportunities, buildings, churches, schools, including a branch of the University of Alaska campus, and a city owned liquor store. As with Beaver, the only way to reach Fort Yukon is either by air or by boat on the Yukon River. Large items such as trucks, cars, all-terrain vehicles, etc. are brought by barge in the summer months, while all other items are brought by air.

The 2011 census indicate that there were a total of 586 residents with the median age of 33.7. A large majority (89.2%) of the residents are Gwich'in (http://www.city-data.com/city/Fort-Yukon-Alaska.html). The Gwich'in descendants come from various Gwich'in villages such as Venetie, Arctic Village, Birch Creek, Chalkyitsik, Circle, Beaver and Old Crow. Like the residents of Beaver, Fort Yukon residents also subsist off the land and hunt for caribou, moose, bear, muskrats, ducks, geese and also fish. Summer gardens also provide an opportunity for canning fresh vegetables for the winter months. Homes are made of log, and HUD homes are prevalent with running water in most of the homes (Alaska.Com, 2013).

Figure 3.1. Beaver, Alaska and Fort Yukon, Alaska.
Beaver, AK (left) and Fort Yukon, AK (right). (photo credit of Fort Yukon: Allan Hayton)

Fairbanks is located in the interior of Alaska. 7.7% of the demographics of the Fairbanks area are Alaskan Native or American Indian (United States Census Bureau, 2017). Of the Alaska Native population in Fairbanks, there are many Gwich'in residents. Although Fairbanks is not the homeland of these Gwich'in residents, many choose to live in Alaska's second largest city because of a variety of reasons, such as difficulty in finding employment or the high cost of living in the smaller Gwich'in villages. Other reasons related to the large population of Gwich'in

in Fairbanks may also be for health issues or because this is where they were born and raised (Leask, Killorin, & Martin, 2001). Fairbanks is the hub of the interior of Alaska. It is Alaska's second largest city.

Fairbanks is home to a for-profit Native corporation called Doyon, Limited. Doyon, as it is widely known, is an Alaskan Native regional corporation that serves most of the interior Alaskan Natives through jobs and yearly dividends (https://www.doyon.com/our-corporation/). Tanana Chiefs Conference is the non-profit Native Corporation that provides health and social services to tribal members throughout the Interior (Tanana Chiefs Conference, 2018).

Also located in Fairbanks, is the University of Alaska Fairbanks where Gwich'in language classes are offered. Many Native people congregate at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, where some services are held in dagoo, which is the Gwich'in liturgical dialect. Furthermore, there are large Native held events which are popular, such as the Annual Athabascan Fiddle Festival or the Festival of Native Arts. Fairbanks is easily accessible to and from all of the interior villages by daily flight services.

Participants

Participants for this study were all Gwich'in people, and claimed various Gwich'in places as their hometown, even though at the time of the study, some lived in another place such as Fairbanks. Hometowns represented were Beaver, Fort Yukon, Old Crow, Chalkyitsik and Arctic Village. All of these villages are in Alaska with the exception of Old Crow which is in the Yukon Territory of Canada. Initially, I had hoped to interview a man and a woman in groups from 20-80 years old. In the end, ten participants (plus myself) agreed to be interviewed.

Two participants wanted to be part of the study but they did not want to be audiotaped. One chose to write his answers down on his own time, and the other would not let me ask him

questions, instead he chose to tell me a narrative that he then validated by telling me to reiterate to him what he had said. He was satisfied when I was able to recount accurately what he had said. In addition, I was also one of the participants because I had learned my language as an adult, and like the participant who chose to write his answers, I also did the same thing.

During this research, all participants were given the option of having their real name used or using a pseudonym. Two participants opted for a pseudonym; however, a third participant was added to allow more complete anonymity of the 20-30 year old female. This third participant was the 20-30 year old male. For those wishing to be anonymous, I provided past common Gwich'in names which are sometimes biblical names, and passed down within families but not necessarily from the same families. As a result, the names Maggie (20-30 year old female), Raavit (20-30 year old male) and Soozun (70-80 year old female) are pseudonyms. In addition to using pseudonyms for these three participants, these participants' home villages or line of work will not be revealed in order to further protect their anonymity.

My two main participants, Rochelle and Charleen, are from Beaver, Alaska, and had been in the process of learning Gwich'in at the time of the research. The reasons that I chose these two main participants for my study is because: (1) they are Gwich'in language learners; (2) they have been former students of my university Gwich'in language class, and (3) they both lived in the same community of Beaver. At the time of this study, Rochelle was between 30 and 40 years old and Charleen was between 40 and 50 years old. For a more detailed description of their history and background, see Chapter 4 for their profiles. Table 3.4 specifies, among other things, participants' hometown, current residence, education and occupation.

Table 3.4 Main Participants

Name	Age	Gender	Hometown	Current Residence	Education	Occupation
R. Adams	30	Female	Beaver, Fort Yukon	Anchorage	B.A.: Art	Artist; Business owner
C. Fisher-Salmon	40	Female	Beaver	Beaver	M.Ed.: Language & Literacy	Principal-Teacher

Rochelle lives in different parts of the State for various reasons. She sometimes lives in either Fairbanks or Anchorage because of job opportunities. Other times, she lives in Beaver to fish for the summer or to harvest moose in the fall. Rochelle is close to her father, and her children are also close to their grandfather, who among other traditional knowledge, teaches Rochelle and her children how to hunt and fish.

Charleen also lives in different parts of the Interior, mostly in Gwich'in communities such as Chalkyitsik, Fort Yukon or Circle. The main reason for her to move to these different villages is to be the K-12 teacher. Because of family, Charleen and her family make trips to Chalkyitsik to visit close relatives.

In order to provide a background for the main participants, I also interviewed nine other Gwich'in participants from various Gwich'in hometowns, as listed on Table 3.5. The reason for the background participants was to place the main participants in a generational context related to their language learning experiences.

Table 3.5 Background Participants

Name	Age	Gender	Hometown	Current Residence	Education	Occupation
***Maggie**	20-30	Female	confidential	confidential	Some college	Student
***Raavit**	20-30	Male	Fort Yukon	Fort Yukon	UAF Freshman	Student
O. Peter-Raboff	30-40	Male	Arctic Village	Fairbanks	Some college	Business owner
A. Hayton	40-50	Male	Arctic Village	Fairbanks	B.A.: Theatre	Graduate Student
C. Adams	50-60	Male	Beaver	Beaver	High School	Subsistence provider, Carpenter, Tour guide
H. Sikorski	50-60	Female	Fort Yukon	Fairbanks	M.Ed.: Curriculum & Instruction	UAF Faculty
***Soozan**	70-80	Female	confidential	confidential	Boarding School; Trade School	Retired
P. Williams Sr.	70-80	Male	Arctic Village	Beaver	Military	Retired
S. Francis Sr.	80-90	Male	Old Crow; Chalkyitsik	Fort Yukon	Gwich'in ways of knowing	Retired

*Pseudonyms

A short profile was created for each participant. Profiles are based on interviews. During the interviews the participants reflected on their language learning and the issues that arise regarding language use. In addition, the profiles provide an opportunity to visualize a short

history of the participants' lives. Some of the participants provided more information regarding their personal history.

Profiles

The importance of providing these profiles is that each will provide a brief history of each individual over the span of her or his life. This will place them at specific times in their lives, and reveal how each time period affects views on language learning.

Background Participant—20-30 Year Old Maggie.

This 20-30 year old Gwich'in female chose not to be identified, and so she will be given the pseudonym Maggie. Maggie lives in a Gwich'in village, and was raised there until her early teens, and then moved to the lower 48 with her family until she turned 18, and promptly moved back to her homeland. Maggie is a responsible young woman because she holds down a summer job which others in her age bracket in the village could not complete. She has a calm demeanor, an easy smile, and is a very thoughtful and caring person.

Maggie is also a student of higher education and has taken the University of Alaska Gwich'in language class taught by the researcher for one year. This class has no textbook available for the students, so each student has to rely on her own notes and organization of them. Maggie states that she has kept her notes from this class which covers a very large array of vocabulary, emergent grammar, and worksheets of the Gwich'in language.

Background Participant—20-30 year old Raavit.

Raavit was born and raised in a Gwich'in village, and as a child under the age of ten, moved to Fairbanks for a short while until one of his parents obtained their degree in higher education. Afterwards, they moved back to their Gwich'in hometown where he has been living

until his graduation from high school. He is currently working on his undergraduate studies, and has taken the Gwich'in language class at the university level.

I have known Raavit over the course of the university academic year, and have found him to be a modest person who is not overly assertive. He greatly respects the Gwich'in way of life which includes learning the language. Raavit prefers Gwich'in village life over life in the city. Traditional activities that he enjoys in the Gwich'in village include easy access to hunting and fishing sites which provides him with a connection to the land. Family is also important to Raavit because his siblings, their children, and immediate family members all live in close proximity to one another in the village where he resides. In addition, there are the friends with whom he grew up. It is easy to see why Raavit enjoys his life in this particular Gwich'in village because of all the interaction and freedom of movement on the land.

Background Participant—30-40 year old Odin Peter-Raboff.

Odin is 30-40 years old and was raised in Los Angeles, California, and then in the following Alaskan places—Arctic Village, Anchorage and Fairbanks. He considers Arctic Village his hometown because that is where his maternal grandfather Steven Tsee Ghò' Peter was from, and with whom he had a strong bond. Odin was raised by his mother who did not speak Gwich'in to him because as Odin said, she was raised to assimilate into society at large and expressed her thinking to him as "I'm not going to raise my children with learning Gwich'in because I want them more importantly just to survive in this world". As a result of this, Odin grew up monolingual in English. Although Odin's first language is English, he also heard Gwich'in from other speakers of Gwich'in, such as his grandparents and their friends and mother's siblings, as he was growing up. Odin took one semester of the university Gwich'in language class, but did not have time beyond that to continue with his language learning. One

semester was not enough exposure to the language for him to begin to speak beyond understanding very few phrases from his grandmother.

The strong bond that Odin had with his grandfather was developed because of the father-daughter relationship of his mother who is a historian and grandfather who had deep knowledge of Gwich'in oral history. Odin's grandfather's first language was Gwich'in, yet they managed to play many games of checkers together. Odin's history of language speaking within his own family is that his grandfather's first language was English, his mother was not a strong speaker of Gwich'in and English was her first language, and because of that Odin's first language is English. Even though he had a strong bond with his grandfather who was a highly proficient speaker of Gwich'in, there was no intergenerational transmission of the language.

Odin went to K-12 school in Anchorage and Fairbanks, and graduated from high school in Fairbanks. He also took a few college courses at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Odin is very much family oriented, and is married to a Yup'ik Eskimo woman who is a very proficient speaker of her language. Together they have two young children. They reside in Fairbanks, and the children are being raised with the Yup'ik language. The connection that Odin had with his grandfather allowed him to have a strong respect for the Gwich'in culture, and as a result he enjoys hunting for large game such as moose and caribou, and to also fish to provide for his family and generously share with his mother, maternal aunts, uncles, and cousins. The way in which Odin provides monetarily for his family is through the creation of his business where he does embroidery and also designs and prints with eco-friendly paints.

Background Participant—40-50 year old Allan Hayton.

Allan was born in Massachusetts, but after his parents divorced, his mother took her children to her homeland of Arctic Village. Allan arrived in Arctic Village at the age of five,

where he had to get used to everything Gwich'in, such as the foods, customs, dances, stories, games, language, etc. At the time that Allan arrived in Arctic Village around 1975, the first language of the entire village, including the children who were Allan's age, was Gwich'in; however, Allan's first language was English. For Allan then, this was submersion in the Gwich'in language and culture.

Like other children all over the world who enter a new social situation, Allan had to overcome obstacles from his peers in order to fit into the social network of the community. One of the venues that Allan found useful in the community was to spend an enormous amount of time with the elders. By spending time with the elders Allan began to learn how to speak Gwich'in through context. Some other important cultural attributes he heard were the traditional stories, kinship relations, stories of out on the land, use of humor, how to play games way into the night, etc. Because of the amount of time of living in Arctic Village as a child, Allan considers Arctic Village as his hometown.

At a later time, Allan moved to Fairbanks to attend school, and again tried to fit into the norms of the dominant society. During this time, he encountered some of the social ills that affect many people who make the transition from a village lifestyle to that of living in a city. Despite these challenges, Allan did finish high school at one of Fairbanks's first charter school for youth, where he met many lifelong friends. Allan eventually obtained a university baccalaureate degree in theatre, and traveled to many places in the United States to perform in theatres. He continues performing throughout the State, sometimes incorporating Gwich'in or Tlingit into his performances.

At the current time, Allan is working towards obtaining his master's degree in Applied Linguistics from the University of Alaska Fairbanks. The focus of his research is directly related

to the Gwich'in language, specifically, the role of a novice language teacher and language learning by high school students through the use of technology. In addition, Allan has also taught Gwich'in at the university and high school levels.

Allan's wish is to continue learning the Gwich'in language, because although he learned as much as he could from living in Arctic Village, he does not consider himself to be a very proficient speaker. He points this out by saying "I learned just as much as I could growing up at the time that I did from the people that were around me. I wouldn't say I'm the most fluent speaker there is. I know I'm not. So there's still a lot I can learn about the language. There's even those ethnographies out there and there's a lot of knowledge that was put down. I guess it's up to us not only to bring our language back but those cultural traits and try to embody it in our lives. So there's still a lot that I need to learn." In reality, Allan is probably being more humble than he lets on because I have personally heard him speaking Gwich'in with other more proficient speakers.

Regarding the status of Gwich'in, Allan is very concerned about future generations. "Wow. I didn't imagine growing up in Arctic Village. You know one day the language would just be in the state that it is now or no one is learning it as a child. It's not the first language. Just in my own lifetime I've seen so much changes that I wonder what's going to happen in the next generation or two."

Background Participant—50-60 year old Hishinlai'.

I was born and raised in Fort Yukon; however, our family lived in Arctic Village until I was about 6 years old. We lived in Arctic Village because that is the homeland of my father, who was Di'Haii Gwich'in. From the age of 6, we moved to and settled in Fort Yukon, and I went to K-12 school there and graduated. The main reason we moved to Fort Yukon was because of the

State operated school that was established there sometime between 1942 and 1954, before Alaska statehood (Case, 1984).

Prior to moving to Fort Yukon, my mother was the appointed school teacher in Arctic Village because she was one of the few Gwich'in people who could speak and understand English, and she had had some education. She was well received and supported in Arctic Village during this time period (Peter, 1992). Since my mother was bilingual, she had contact with school teachers and other non-Natives in Fort Yukon, who at the time, persuaded Gwich'in people to send their children to school and to quit speaking to them in Gwich'in in the hopes that we would obtain an education in order for us to become productive members of society as it was known. "When I first started school is when the teachers and all the non-Native people encouraged all the Gwich'in speaking parents to begin speaking English to us because it would give us a chance to get a better education and a job where we could make money." Therefore, I was of this generation where English became our first language and Gwich'in was our passive language.

After high school graduation, I moved to Alaska's largest city, Anchorage, so that I could go to vocational school, and worked in that field for a few years before going on to a community college. Fast forward to 1989 when I moved to Fairbanks to be near my immediate family, and ended up obtaining a baccalaureate in linguistics in 2000, then a master's in education with an emphasis on curriculum and instruction in 2008. It took a long time to obtain my baccalaureate because I was working full time, had a young family, and took only 2-3 courses a semester; however, during the course of this time, I took an interest in my ancestral language, Gwich'in. Since I was a latent speaker, I thought it was now time to speak the language because it was frustrating understanding the language but unable to contribute to the conversation as a speaker.

As a latent speaker, I also learned about the grammar of my language, and armed with these two tools, it took me about 7 years of perseverance before I was able to obtain enough fluency so that I was hired as the Gwich'in language instructor at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF). Since being hired in 2002 as the UAF Gwich'in language instructor, I have learned about methods and theories of second language acquisition which has allowed me to develop my own language teaching philosophy. This knowledge has been the basis of classes that I teach regarding Native language teaching and learning.

Background Participant—50-60 year old Cliff Adams.

Cliff was born and raised in Beaver, but had also lived in Fort Yukon while raising a young family. Since his young family had relatives in both villages, if they were living in one village, they would go to visit relatives in the other village, and vice-versa. From a young age, Cliff learned how to live off the land—that is hunting, trapping, and fishing, which he continues to do today. Although Cliff grew up learning how to use the land, he did not have the opportunity to learn the language because his parents did not know how to speak the language.

Cliff currently resides in Beaver, where he keeps extremely busy with one local job or another. These jobs, depending on the season, entail being the postmaster, cargo agent, or heavy equipment operator. In addition, he has a tourism business and he is also constantly out on the land hunting, trapping or fishing. Cliff is one of the few men in the village who actively hunts and fishes. Sometimes during the winter or over the summer, one of his young grandsons lives with him. This grandson has taken an intense interest in learning from his grandfather the art of hunting and fishing, and as a result, Cliff is teaching him those very important skills. In addition, he is also involved with the children in the community by taking them out on the land and teaching them traditional skills such as making fish wheels which requires extensive knowledge

of how and when to harvest and the type of tree to use, among many of the other skills necessary to make a fish wheel.

A fish wheel is a device used to catch mainly salmon on the Yukon River. It is made of wood that is bent into two baskets like an S curve which are then covered with a wire mesh. Each of the baskets has a chute which leads to a box on one side of the fish wheel. The baskets float on a type of raft which is secured to the bank of the river, and the current from the river allows the fish wheel to turn. If any fish are running up the river, they may get caught in one of the baskets, and then they slide down the chute into the box on the side. Each day, possibly more than once, the fish wheel is checked for any fish or repairs. If there are fish, they are prepared for drying and smoking.

Background Participant—70-80 year old Soozan.

Soozan grew up in a Gwich'in village, and had a traditional Gwich'in upbringing where the land was the provider of food, water, heat, clothing, and shelter. They moved from place to place with the seasons and animals to either hunt, fish or trap. Soozun said growing up like this on the land was the best part of her life. "That was the best part of my life is out in the tent frame there or during the summer…"

At the age of 14, Soozan's life as she knew it was disrupted because there was a mandate that all Native children go to school. Unfortunately, there was no school in Fort Yukon at the time, so she was sent to the Mt. Edgecumbe boarding school in Sitka, Alaska which is over 700 air miles away, and a totally different culture than the Gwich'in. "And then at one time, they [school authorities] come around and said "you have to bring the kids back to go to school. go to Mt. Edgecumbe." After the first year or two of the boarding school, students are sent home only that one time, and then upon their return to the boarding school, it is up to the parents to come up

with the funds if they want their child(ren) to come back to the village. At that time, it was impossible for Native families to afford the money that it took to pay for airfare on a yearly basis, and so after the first or second year of boarding school, Soozan was not allowed to return home to see her family. "I think it was the first year or the second year that we were there that the government paid our way back home. But after that it's up to your parents." Soozan went to school at Mt. Edgecumbe for a total of eight years, which means that she was around 21 or 22 years old by the time she was finished with her education, and that she had lost at least six years of her formative years away from her language and culture. "I was down there for eight years altogether."

At the time of Soozan's residence, there was an opportunity to receive training for a job that could launch her into the workforce, so after graduating she stayed on to receive highly-skilled training for a blue-collar job. After many years of working in this field, Soozan has been able to retire and enjoys life with her children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, and great great grandchildren.

Background Participant—70-80 year old Paul Williams Sr.

Paul Williams Sr. grew up in Gwich'in country, and currently lives in Beaver, Alaska. He grew up on the land and subsisted through hunting, fishing and the rituals involved with them. Paul is a highly proficient speaker of Gwich'in, and he and his wife (now deceased) of 45 years lived the subsistence lifestyle as much as they could.

Paul shared that in the 1940s/1950s, Gwich'in people were forced to live in villages so that the children could attend school. "People were forced off the land to live in village in 1940s/1950s so kids could go to school." As a result, Paul went to two different boarding schools. The first was Wrangell Institute in Wrangell, Alaska, which is an "ungraded middle

school" where the school capitalizes on a students' ability to progress at a rapid pace so that they could attend other vocational schools or Mt. Edgecumbe (Alaskool, 2013). After Paul's education at the Wrangell Institute, he went to Mt. Edgecumbe which is located in Sitka, Alaska.

After his boarding school experience, Paul joined the army in 1963. At the time of this interview, Paul had been retired for one and one-half years from the federal Fish and Wildlife under the Secretary of the Interior. As a retiree, Paul is involved with a camp near Beaver, where the emphasis is on working with children.

Background Participant—80-90 year old Simon Francis Sr.

Simon grew up in Gwich'in country and was raised by elders. He learned from an early age from them how to survive off the land through traditional men's roles such as making snowshoes, hunting, fishing, trapping, getting wood, etc. Before Simon made life-size snowshoes, he made miniature ones until he became proficient enough to make the life-size ones. Making snowshoes gave Simon the skill of measuring with his body, which is the traditional way of measurement. This skill, in turn, allowed him to work as a carpenter in Fairbanks. He recalls how easy the job was for him. "I make little snowshoes. Long time ago we use [body to measure]. Get used to it. When we come into Fairbanks I got job for Whiteman. I got carpenter's job. Lot of work. …is easy."

By living a subsistence lifestyle, Simon learned the ethics of hard work, and even at his advanced age, Simon still wants to work and is in excellent health. "Now I'm 86 but I still want to work. Nothing wrong [with health]." Other work that Simon has done include being on the Native Council, City Council, church committee, and the University of Alaska Fairbanks, where he and his wife authored a book about what it was like to live a traditional life. "We tell them a story about old time life."

Procedure and Data Analysis

Data collection involved traveling to two main Gwich'in communities, Beaver and Fort Yukon (Table 3.6). Three separate trips were taken for various lengths of time throughout the summer and one trip was taken in the winter.

Table 3.6. Travel for Data Collection

Dates	**Length of Stay**	**Place**
May 30, 2010-June 8, 2010	10 days	Beaver
June 24, 2010-July 6, 2010	13 days	Beaver
July 22, 2010-July 26, 2010	5 days	Fort Yukon
November 11, 2010- November 15, 2010	5 days	Beaver

Interview and observations also took place over the span of the summer and winter months in Fairbanks.

Main data collection were semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Data collection began on June 1, 2010 and ended on December 14, 2010 (see Table 3.6) resulting in 590 minutes of recordings, plus 20 pages of written data. Before each interview was conducted, participants were told about the nature of the study in Gwich'in, English, or a mixture of the two languages. If they agreed to be a participant, they either signed a consent form or verbally said on the audiotape that they consented with the option of non-participation at any time during the interviews.

The open-ended interview questions were initially created by the researcher, and then through a committee meeting, were refined. Two sets of open-ended interview questions were created. One set of interview questions were for the main participants (Appendix B), and the other set were for the general participants (Appendix C). For both sets, the interviews began with an open-ended interview script in which the interviewer asked if participants were taking part of

their own free will. If the answer was "yes", then each participant was asked to sign a consent form, which was reviewed with them by the researcher. All participants were asked for their permission to be recorded. If they consented, then the interviews began.

The interviews for the main participants were a little more fluid, but the emphasis was for them to focus on what they felt was important to them; however there were some guiding topics, such as personal history, language involvement, reasons for learning their language, language learning opinions, and goals. In contrast, the general participants had a more semi-structured set of questions; however they could also add what they thought was important to them. Table 3.7 shows the places, amounts of time recorded and dates spent with each participant.

Table 3.7. Dates, Times, and Places of Interviews with Participants

Participant	**Date**	**Length of Interview**	**Place**
C. Fisher-Salmon	June 1, 2010	90 mins.	Beaver
A. Hayton	June 14, 2010	~94 mins.	Fairbanks
Soozan	June 24, 2010	90 mins.	Fort Yukon
R. Adams	June 28, 2010	90 mins.	Beaver
R. Adams	July 2, 2010	~15 mins.	Beaver
Soozan	July 24, 2010	~7.5 mins.	Fort Yukon
Raavat, Maggie	July 25, 2010	54 mins.	Fort Yukon
S. Francis	July 26, 2010	60 mins.	Fort Yukon
C. Fisher-Salmon	November 13, 2010	~45 mins.	Beaver
O. Peter-Raboff	December 14, 2010	45 mins.	Fairbanks

In addition to the above data collected, there were also three participants that provided written answers to the semi-structured questions that were not recorded, and were considered as part of the data collected (Table 3.8).

The audiotapes were then transcribed into three columns. The first column contained the transcriptions; the second column was used to identity emerging themes, and the third column provided space for validity or comments from the participants.

Table 3.8. Data Collection

Data Collected	Length	Dates
Audiotapes	590 minutes resulting in 272 typed pages	June 1 to December 14, 2010
Written	11 typed pages 4 typed pages 5 typed pages	May 12, 2010 November 15, 2010 November 15, 2010

The way in which this data was analyzed was through a method known as grounded theory.

Analytic Framework

Grounded theory.

Charmaz (2014) provide a definition of grounded theory methods as follows:

> **Grounded theory methods:** consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves. Thus researchers construct a theory "grounded" in their data. Grounded theory begins with inductive data, invokes iterative strategies of going back and forth between data and analysis, uses comparative methods, and keeps you interacting and involved with your data and emerging analysis. (p. 1, emphasis in original)

Coding is iterative, which means that one has to read, then re-read data. Initial coding is broad in terms of categories, and preliminary labels are attached. As codes are read and re-read, coding helps to refine the preliminary labels, so that interpretation can occur (Charmaz, 2014).

Before coding can begin, there are certain procedures that are helpful when thinking about the data. For instance, what is the overarching goal of the research? This knowledge then drives the coding into categories, which then helps to organize the data so that themes occur.

These themes are juxtaposed with theories to discover, explain, and understand the connections (Richards, 2003).

For this research, the overall goal was to attempt to understand how language learning and identity are connected for Gwich'in participants. What did the participants say about what "being Gwich'in" means to them, and what were they doing about language learning? When themes emerged, they were compared across all of the participants. The themes were then connected to theories of identity and second language acquisition.

Summary

This chapter on methodology presented an overview of how this research was conducted as a qualitative study that used grounded theory as an analytical tool. The main participants in this study are second language learners of Gwich'in, who were also the researcher's Gwich'in language students at one point in their lives. Also, the other participants were from various generations of Gwich'in, some of whom were second language learners or who possessed some proficiency level of the language. Data collected included audio recordings and written answers to a semi-structured questionnaire. The analysis of this data will be the focus in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

This chapter will address the following research questions: (1) What are the experiences of ancestral language learners of Gwich'in?; (2) How do Gwich'in ancestral language learners understand these experiences in relation to identity?, and (3) In view of the construction of Gwich'in ancestral language learners' identities, what do participants state about the role of the community?

Eleven Gwich'in people were interviewed to try to understand their feelings and thoughts about ancestral language learning and identity. Data collection occurred through semi-structured interviews, and participant observation. Coding of the data occurred through the use of grounded theory, which is an iterative process of reading, then re-reading. Through this process, themes emerged that lent themselves to understanding how language learning and identity are linked.

This chapter consists of the themes that emerged from the background participants, followed by profiles of the two main participants, and an analysis of their language learning experiences related to identity development.

Themes: Background and Main Participants

In this section, the background participants' interviews will be presented holistically by themes. Themes that emerged from the data are: (1) improving language proficiency; (2) expressing desire to learn Gwich'in; (3) utilizing formal education; (4) employing activities other than language; (5) promoting intergenerational transmission; and (6) providing and receiving positive support. An emphasis is placed on what the background participants reported doing concretely for language learning or teaching. In addition, some excerpts from the main participants that are relevant to the themes will be included. A caveat that is inherent in some of the excerpts is that they can overlap with other themes, such as a learner's expressing desire to

learn but at the same time needing support. The themes are as follows and are discussed in more detail below:

- improving language proficiency
- expressing desire to learn Gwich'in
- utilizing formal education
- employing activities other than language
- promoting intergenerational transmission
- providing and receiving positive support

Improving Language Proficiency

Overall, there is a generational divide between the background participants, in that those who are under the age of 50 are second language learners of Gwich'in, while those who are above the age of 70 have Gwich'in as their first language. The situation for these two major generations for language learning and teaching occurred because the generation of highly proficient speakers was encouraged to use English with subsequent generations. Like most concerned parents, this type of thinking became an ideology because of parents' desire for a good quality of life for their children in an ever-changing society as Indigenous and dominant cultures melded.

Almost all of the background participants and the main participants expressed some form of proficiency, or lack thereof, in the Gwich'in language. Gwich'in language proficiency levels, according to ACTFL, of the participants were in the range from novice low to distinguished. At the highest end of the scale are the elders whose first language is Gwich'in, and are able to speak at the distinguished and advanced- high levels in the four assessment criteria—global tasks and functions, context/content, accuracy, and text type. In addition to speaking, some of the

participants are able to read and write in Gwich'in. All the rest of the participants and the main participants speak Gwich'in as a second language, and have expressed their feelings about their speaking ability.

Several background participants make a conscientious effort to use Gwich'in with other community members who speak the language. These community members may be known speakers or those who are learning the language.

Amongst the Gwich'in community, and others who have heard Allan speak, he is a well-known speaker and writer of Gwich'in, but he considers himself a language learner. In the Gwich'in community of Fairbanks where he lives, and in other Gwich'in communities, Allan is called upon to speak at Indigenous gatherings or to sing in the church. He also translates and does recordings of Gwich'in. In order to keep up his momentum to further develop his language learning, Allan speaks Gwich'in with the researcher because he knows that she is also a language learner and knows that she can understand most of what he says. Allan also speaks the language with various people whenever the occasion arises. It is apparent from Excerpt 1 that even during the interview with him; Allan chose to use the language.

Excerpt 1

> [Allan speaks] With students, with yourself, with relatives, Gwich'in speakers. …geetak sheech'aahłaii ts'à' nihłàa giriikhii [sometimes she (another Gwich'in speaker) calls me and we speak to each other]. Aiits'à' facebook gwakat t'ąąłch'yaa ts'à' emails chan ts'à' gehtak jùu nąįį goovaał'in ts'à' nihłàa girinkhii." [And I also use the language on Facebook and emails and sometimes when I see others, we speak to each other.]

Allan uses every opportunity he can on a daily basis to not only speak or use the language, but to also focus on a variety of means to employ other proficiency skills through social media, such as writing on Facebook, emails or speaking on the phone. Engaging in these activities with other Gwich'in people, it is a form of networking for using Gwich'in and continuing to improve his

Gwich'in proficiency. Allan is a language teacher, language learner, and Gwich'in person who perpetuates the use of the language. He does wherever there are Gwich'in speakers or learners, such as in Gwich'in communities or Whitehorse, which is located in Canada, as in Excerpt 2.

Excerpt 2

> I remember when I was in Whitehorse [name of person]. She was one of the people I grew up with in Arctic [Village]. I ran into her in Whitehorse. We were sitting at the [name of business] and was talking away.

Using the language is a large part of Allan's identity as a Gwich'in person because as he says in Excerpt 3 it makes him feel good.

Excerpt 3

It was a good thing to speak the language.

The researcher, as a language learner, I consider my speaking proficiency level to be at the advanced-mid level, but am also literate (reading and writing) in the language, and am able to listen to other speakers' discourse to learn new vocabulary in context. In order for further development in the language, I approach various people as in Excerpt 4, and make every possible effort to use the language with them. These people—family members, other speakers of various proficiencies, latent speakers, language learners, and students—do not necessarily have to be of Gwich'in descent because I have many students from throughout the world, such as Greece, Japan or Canada, and all throughout the U.S.

Excerpt 4

> I use it [language] with my family, other speakers, learners, and students in the Gwich'in language class. I use the language when I know the person is a speaker, latent speaker or a learner, and it doesn't matter to me where they are.

By using the language with every possible person who is Gwich'in or a student, I take up the role that I am Gwich'in and am capable of speaking the language if I choose to do so. The

notion of "it doesn't matter to me where they are" is in reference to attitudes about speaking Gwich'in in public. Once, when I was speaking Gwich'in in public, I was ridiculed by another Indigenous person; however, knowing this does not prevent me from speaking in public. As an Indigenous language learner from my generation and current language learners, this attitude is changing for the positive, and that is why no matter where I might be, I use the language with others whom I know can at least understand some of what I say.

I was a latent speaker for many years, meaning that most of everything that I heard spoken in the language was understood (listening skills) but I was unable to respond, as is expressed in Excerpt 5. I was able to only say a few formulaic phrases, like to ask "neenjit dôonch'yaa?" (how are you?) or "màhsì' choo" (a big thank you) and barely much beyond that. As a child I remember hearing the language all the time because my mother would take me along to the card games when the Gwich'in elders socialized in their first language, Gwich'in.

Excerpt 5

> At these card games, they [elders] would speak nothing but Gwich'in. I totally understood everything they were saying.

It was not until my studies at the university that I became interested in learning my ancestral language, so I began to learn Gwich'in as an adult in my 40s as in Excerpt 6.

Excerpt 6

> I have learned my language as an adult.

For me, learning my language as an adult led to my own sense of identity as a Gwich'in person because being able to speak my language filled me with a great sense of pride. Also, by learning the language as an adult, I know it is possible for other adults to learn the language. The next speaker is Charleen, one of the main participants.

Charleen has a novice low level of Gwich'in vocabulary, which she realizes, hinders her ability to converse in the language. Nonetheless, Charleen does use Gwich'in vocabulary by way of commands, thereby stating her identity as a Gwich'in woman. She is able to introduce herself, name items that she knows or describe a feeling or greeting in the language. In addition to vocabulary that is at a novice low level, most of this vocabulary is limited to formulaic phrases and she has not been able to further develop her speaking proficiency skills.

In Charleen's experiences of using the language, she noticed that a large number of Gwich'in language learners use only formulaic phrases such as statements about the weather or to inquire about how a person is doing. She indicates in Excerpt 7 that she is unable to say more complex sentences that she would like to be able to convey because she is unable to put these sentences together in a cohesive fashion. Even novice language learners can use chunks and formulaic expressions to demonstrate their sense of identity through language and to encourage others to help them learn more by engaging them in additional conversation.

Excerpt 7

> I'm not really sure about combining words and phrases that are not formulaic like weather. I mean those are all the same. It's not like "downriver was clear but here, it's smoky". You know, I don't know how to put that together. I have no idea.

Nonetheless, even though Charleen is frustrated about not going beyond formulaic phrases, she still exhibits a novice low proficiency level of speaking, according to ACTFL guidelines.

The next speaker is Rochelle, one of the main participants, who was a language learner in the university classroom. In Excerpt 8, she points out that she understands more than she can produce in Gwich'in.

Excerpt 8

> I mean I can get by barely. I have lots to learn but I can understand.

Rochelle's experience of being able to comprehend more than she can produce is typical of most language learners, and through practice has the potential to develop her language learning speaking proficiency to the next level. Rochelle is a very successful language learner and being able to participate in basic conversations and being able to understand most of what is said around her in Gwich'in is a very meaningful accomplishment for her. Rochelle does not indicate this, but as her university instructor, one of the skills that are learned in the classroom is how to write the language, and so I am aware that she also has proficiency in writing skills

Maggie is another background participant who enrolled in the university Gwich'in class. She makes a sincere effort to use Gwich'in with others, as she notes in Excerpt 9. Her idea of "to at least try" is an encouraging attitude.

Excerpt 9

> You have to at least try. I don't want to be like "I don't know what you're saying."

Finally, Odin is a background participant who attempts, as he states in Excerpt 10, to use what little language he knows with his two young children.

Excerpt 10

> I'm just trying to teach my kids a few things [language].

Both Odin's and Maggie's speaking proficiency levels are in the novice-low range, but nonetheless they both use the language with children and community members. This type of reasoning affords them the opportunity to practice speaking and hearing the language in context, which contributes to their identity as Gwich'in learners.

The language was instilled in Maggie as a child when she heard the language by way of commands that were said to her by her mother as she recalls in Excerpt 11.

Excerpt 11

I remember some words my Mom used to say. "Aanaii [come here]. Khanchì'! [hurry up!] Onts'it kwaa [don't lie]."

The significance of this is that these are commands that she will never forget, and this has placed her in a position where she can use the language in context, which incorporates these commands with other children in the community. If so, the generation after her will have a language foundation that will make it easier for them to learn the language. In addition, generationally, it is unclear what Maggie's mother's proficiency level was for speaking the language, but since she was able to use commands with Maggie, her speaking proficiency may have been between novice-low to novice-mid levels.

Odin expresses in Excerpt 12 that his Gwich'in is not very good, and that he knows only the basics and some vocabulary.

Excerpt 12

basic things, and some words and stuff like that but nowhere near being fluent

ACTFL distinguishes between being fluent in a language and language proficiency. When a person is fluent in their language, they are able to express "their interests and special fields of competence, explain complex matters in detail, and provide lengthy and coherent narrations, all with ease, fluency, and accuracy." (ACTFL, 2012, p. 5).

Summary: Proficiency as a useful concept.

Language proficiency refers to what a person can do in the language regarding speaking, reading, writing or listening. All of these skills vary in terms of levels of proficiency from novice-low to distinguished. The ACTFL notion that people possess some level of proficiency sheds a positive light on what all of the Gwich'in participants are able to do with the language.

Proficiency shows that all of the speakers are on one level or another in the skills of speaking, reading, writing or listening. Even if they might be at the novice level, it shows they are proficient to a certain degree, and should be proud of this accomplishment. The fact that participants are at one level or another means that there is room to strive for more language development to be possible.

All participants were grappling with what they could and would not do in the language. Talking to learners about proficiency could make them feel more positive about their language learning and progress, which could make them think about what to work on next to improve proficiency.

Language Learners—Expressing Desire to Learn

As noted, all of the background participants who are 50 and under expressed in one way or another that they would like to learn to improve their proficiency in their ancestral language, Gwich'in. Although in some instances, such as for the 20-year-old participants, they did not express it directly, it was expressed through their past actions, such as enrolling in the university language class. In addition, one of the participants was a high school Gwich'in language teacher who articulated that the students in his class really wanted to learn the language. Besides expressing the desire to learn Gwich'in, all of the language learners are in various phases of their language learning, with some who are at a novice-low to others who are able to read and write in the language at an intermediate level and be able to interact with those speakers who are advanced in the language. Below are some concrete examples of excerpts from some of these language learners of their experiences and thoughts for language learning.

As a student at a university, Maggie took it upon herself to enroll in the university Gwich'in language class. This is a good concrete example of Maggie to show that expressing her

desire to learn Gwich'in had become a reality by attending the university Gwich'in language class, where the emphasis is on speaking. By enrolling in the class, Maggie pushed her proficiency to the next level in the areas of speaking, reading, writing, and listening.

Twenty-year-old Raavit, despite the rigors of his university program, made the choice so that it was possible for him to take the university Gwich'in class. Despite the fact that he had a conflict with another class, he worked it out with the instructor to take the Gwich'in class because as he relates in Excerpt 13 that he really wanted to learn Gwich'in. This shows that he took action rather than inaction to learn Gwich'in. Learning Gwich'in afforded him one way for him to improve his understanding of the Gwich'in language, and increase his proficiency for reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Excerpt 13

I really wanted to learn it [Gwich'in language].

Another Gwich'in language learner participant is 30-year-old Odin who is an example of someone who knows "basics and some vocabulary", as he related in Excerpt 12 above. By knowing "basics and some vocabulary", this places Odin on a novice level of language proficiency because although he may not be well understood by those more proficient, he is able to understand through listening, snippets of conversation. When Odin was asked if there was anything that he would like to learn, he indicated in Excerpt 14 that he would like to learn the language.

Excerpt 14

…language is another one. I think that's just really really important.

When Odin was asked about why he would like to learn the language, he related that it is because he finds it an important connection to his ancestors, which produces a feeling of pride.

Besides the importance of learning and knowing the language, Odin states that there is other traditional knowledge, such as singing or dancing, which [see Excerpt 24] is addressed under *employing activities other than language*. The ways in which Odin expresses his pride, his connection to his ancestors, and his respect for Gwich'in culture provides a firm foundation for his Gwich'in identity.

For Rochelle expressing the desire to learn Gwich'in took root when she was a young child because she realized that one of her grandmothers spoke Gwich'in. She remembers wanting to know what her grandmother was saying. Rochelle is close in age to one of her cousins, whom she visited often as a child. Her cousin lived under the same roof with their grandmother, and understood some of her grandmother's questions, such as "who is that?", and she would answer back. In Excerpt 15, Rochelle reflects on her desire to want to understand and participate in the discourse that took place between her grandmother and her cousin.

Excerpt 15

> My gramma probably spoke the most that I was around and just hearing her and then people would know what she was saying and I was like "Man! I want to know what she's saying." I remember she would speak and say "Jùu dèe?" [who?] and then [cousin] would say "Oh. That's somebody vigii [his/her child]." and I was like "How does SHE know what she's saying?" I was like "Man! I want to know."

Later, when Rochelle became a student at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, she states that one of the reasons for her enrollment was because she had always wanted to learn how to speak Gwich'in. Upon discovering that the university offered a Gwich'in language class, Rochelle became excited, as she expresses in Excerpt 16.

Excerpt 16

> Oh! I just JUMPED at the opportunity because I always wanted to learn. I've always wanted to learn Gwich'in.

Rochelle made good on her desire to learn the language, which then caused her to understand much more of the language. Learning her language increased her proficiency in the language to a level where she was able to use it to teach elementary students as a visiting artist in the Yukon Flats School District, a Gwich'in school district, after her graduation from the university. Teaching the language to others is an excellent way to retain what had been learned, and Rochelle was very happy in her role as an itinerant teacher of art in which she incorporated the language and Gwich'in culture. By incorporating the language and culture into her teaching, it created a sense of pride in her about what it means to be Gwich'in.

Cliff expressed in Excerpt 17 that he would like to learn the Gwich'in language in order to speak. Cliff relates that when he hears the language, he does not understand it but nonetheless it makes him feel good.

Excerpt 17

> I would like to speak our Gwich'in language! To hear our language spoken makes me feel good, even though I don't understand.

Cliff makes the connection between language and the subsistence lifestyle in Excerpt 18, stating that for Gwich'in people they are both equally important. When people have a passion, such as Cliff has for the subsistence lifestyle, this passion provides an ideal situation in which to learn the language because there is a lot of language associated with those types of activities. These activities can be the beginnings of language learning for Cliff, which can relate language to the act of a subsistence lifestyle, thereby contributing to his identity as a Gwich'in person.

Excerpt 18

Our language is as important as our subsistence lifestyle.

Finally, as the researcher I was a latent speaker—one who understands the language—of Gwich'in but was never able to speak the language. I had a strong desire to speak Gwich'in because I wanted a deeper connection to my roots. Also, I wanted to see if it was possible to learn to speak the language as an adult. Similar to all beginning language learners, I began at the novice level of proficiency. I have been able to develop enough proficiency over the years to be able to teach intermediate Gwich'in language classes at the university level.

Summary: Expressing a desire to learn the language.

Expressing a desire to learn the language develops a positive relationship with other Gwich'in speakers. Knowing the language establishes a link to the past, and provides a deeper understanding of the culture. Knowing the language brings a sense of identity and pride.

Connected to expressing the desire to learn the language is the utilization of resources available that can assist in learning the language, which in turn may provide tools for teaching the language, thereby affording different levels of proficiency for both language learners and teachers. One of these resources is formal education, which will be the next topic of discussion.

Utilizing Formal Education

Three background participants and both of the main participants enrolled in the university language class, while two other background participants enrolled in university classes that focused on second language acquisition. The three background participants who enrolled to take the university Gwich'in language class all had some Gwich'in language proficiency and knowledge of the culture. They took the class because their ancestral language is Gwich'in, and had a desire to further their proficiency levels. This language class is an intense beginning class,

and lasts one academic year. Usually, when students enroll in this class, most of the students have no knowledge of the language or culture. Since the class is intense and expectations of the students are high, students usually attain a "Novice High Speaking" level, according to the ACTFL proficiency scales when they apply themselves. The class focuses mostly on speaking, but writing, reading, and emergent grammar are also used as tools to mediate their speaking ability (Sikorski, 2008).

Rochelle and Charleen, the main participants, both increased their proficiency levels by taking the beginning university Gwich'in class, but Charleen was only able to take the shorter summer course; whereas Rochelle took three years of Gwich'in. Over the span of three years, Rochelle learned reading, writing, listening, grammar, and began to read and understand Gwich'in traditional stories. In addition, she also learned how to do field work with a very proficient speaker of the language. This exposure to the language vastly increased Rochelle's proficiency and understanding of the language.

Maggie and Raavit were the two participants who enrolled in the university language class for one academic year, and Odin was part of the class over one semester. All three participants are under the age of 30, and have made it possible to take Gwich'in at the university. Despite their busy sometimes conflicting schedules, all three scheduled taking the class into their busy lives. It was something for which they hungered because knowing the language was an important part of their identity. Since the class does not have a textbook, students have to be organized and take notes on which they rely.

Maggie has kept the notes from the university class (see Excerpt 19) and uses them to mediate speaking with her friend if they are stuck on how to say something or to recall vocabulary. Having these notes as a resource to practice speaking with others is a good way to

increase one's proficiency level because the notes reflect verb conjugations, noun inflections, emergent grammar rules, postpositions (prepositions), adjectives, and familial terms, etc..

Excerpt 19

> Sometimes we have to go back and look at our notes. I still have all mine. I didn't throw any away.

It is evident that Maggie values the formal knowledge she gained in the university Gwich'in class and that they continue to be useful to her and others even after the class is over. Her Gwich'in language notes are meaningful and personal to her because she wrote them herself and she can understand and use them as a personal reference and guide.

Rochelle took three years of the university Gwich'in language class because she thought it was a good opportunity to learn the language, as she says in Excerpt 20. There are only two academic years that the Gwich'in classes are offered, but through independent study courses that focus on Gwich'in culture, traditional stories, and language learning, Rochelle was able to obtain a Native Language minor. The university class was a stepping-stone for Rochelle because it afforded her the opportunity to learn the language. By attending the university classes, Rochelle's proficiency level was extended from a novice-low level to an intermediate-high level in all areas of speaking, reading, writing, and listening skills. Initially, Rochelle only knew single vocabulary, and although it was valuable to know single vocabulary, she was able to use them to create sentences and to be able to ask questions in context; thereby enabling her to use her newly acquired intermediate-high level proficiency with other speakers during her travels to Gwich'in villages.

Excerpt 20

> it [university] seemed like a good place to learn while I'm in college.

Gwich'in classes meet five times a week and require a significant investment of time and energy on the part of the students. Not everyone who expresses a desire to learn Gwich'in and attends the university actually enrolls in the class, due to cost, time, and schedules. However, Rochelle made that choice in order to develop higher levels of Gwich'in language proficiency.

Charleen took a summer Gwich'in language course with two Gwich'in language instructors. The focus of this course was on conversation, as opposed to learning the grammar or the writing systems. Taking the class shows, that she is interested in learning Gwich'in; however, for Charleen, time is an issue as she expresses in Excerpt 21. Since Charleen does not have the time to learn more Gwich'in, she would rather spend her time on increasing her students' proficiency level.

Excerpt 21

> I invest a lot of my time in my students [K-12] in providing a good learning environment for them to learn Gwich'in.

Another side of formal education is to learn about tenets of second language acquisition, which is a crucial component in order to understand second language teaching. As a language teacher, learning about second language acquisition becomes a tool that can be used in the classroom to understand how to teach to students who are learning Gwich'in as a second language. It is in this capacity as Gwich'in language teachers that the next two participants have furthered their education in this field. Allan has firsthand experience as a language learner because as a child at the age of four, he was submersed in the language when he began to live in Arctic Village; however, at the time of this research, he did not have much experience in teaching Gwich'in. Once Allan learned about second language acquisition, he began to understand the complexities of language learning and teaching.

Teaching a second language so that learners are engaged and enjoy themselves is not like teaching any other subject matter in which one has expertise, such as the subjects of science or history. Teaching a second language requires creativity, flexibility in lesson plans, and to think and react quickly to any queries made by students. Experience in teaching a second language is a bonus, but to get there, a language teacher needs to employ theories which they believe will lead to a successful language class. Allan, in Excerpt 22, realizes that there is more to language teaching than common sense.

Excerpt 22

> And I think I've learned in this last year teaching [Gwich'in language]. It seems like a simple enough idea. "Ok. Just get in the classroom and just begin teaching" And there's a whole other element involved.

The "whole other element involved" to which Allan refers are taking classes that make him aware of teaching languages, as he says in Excerpt 23.

Excerpt 23

> SLA [second language acquisition] theories, classroom culture, methods, things you don't intend to teach, be conscious of what is being taught.

The researcher is also a language teacher, and like Allan, also needed to acquire knowledge about second language teaching and acquisition. Both Allan and the researcher have taken the initiative to learn about second language acquisition through university classes, which makes it possible for them to pass on these much needed skills to others who are interested in teaching their Indigenous language. In addition, for Allan and the researcher, they both continue to learn more of the language to increase their proficiency in the language.

Summary: Utilizing formal education.

Formal language classes and know of second language acquisition support language learning and teaching efforts. However, classes require lots of time, energy, and costs. Besides

taking the initiative to learn the language or acquire skills to teach the language, some participants enjoy cultural activities that contribute to their well-being.

Employing Activities Other than Language

Knowing "basic things" about the language limits Odin's ability to communicate with others in the language. Nonetheless, Odin finds that he feels a very strong connection to his roots. Even if he is not learning the language, he is learning other skills, such as dancing, fishing, hunting, etc., (see Excerpt 24), which makes him feel proud to honor his ancestors.

Excerpt 24

> I love the traditional singing and dancing so those are really important. I feel like I'm more connected. I feel like I'm more whole and I feel happier having that kind of knowledge and having that strength. It's like soul food. It just makes my psyche just feel better and it's also just like pride because I'm pretty proud. Proud of what our people have accomplished and I like to think about a lot of the optimistic things that helps me when I learn those things.

For Odin, despite not knowing much about the language, knowledge of cultural activities makes him feel connected and it strengthens his identity as a Gwich'in person because of the happiness and pride it produces in him.

At the time of this research, Allan was also a high school teacher of Gwich'in, and he states that the youth wanting to learn the language is complex because no one is taking the time to teach them, and at the same time, the generations above them want them to learn their ancestral language. Since these students are in Allan's high school class, they have made him aware of their desire to learn the language.

As far as what language learners should do to continue learning the language, Allan expresses in Excerpt 25 his hope that language learners take it upon themselves, after they have had a good foundation of language learning, to go out on their own to continue learning the language through different means.

Excerpt 25

> to see them [language learners] to where they are more and more autonomous as [a] learner so that they're learning more and more on their own.

For Allan, once students learn in school how to use the language, it is preferable for him to see them continue learning the language outside of the classroom as individuals.

Fifty-year-old Cliff expresses a desire to learn the language, but does not have the opportunity to learn in the village where he lives. Even though Cliff would like to learn how to speak Gwich'in to add to his identity as a Gwich'in man, he does live the lifestyle of a hunter, fisher, and trapper. Cliff's statement in Excerpt 26 confirms his love for being one with the land in which he states some of the cultural activities that he likes to do and his feelings about being out on the land.

Excerpt 26

> Fishing and making smoked salmon, building fish wheel. All phases of putting salmon up for the year. Trapping, being out in the country. I feel so free and close to mother earth.

Summary: Employing activities other than language.

Learning and speaking Gwich'in is not the only indicator for expressing pride in Gwich'in identity. Time honored traditions that are ingrained in the culture also contribute to Gwich'in identity in ways that produce a sense of self-esteem.

The above are concrete examples of cultural activities that some participants are doing which does not include language learning, but some participants have expressed that intergenerational transmission of the language could benefit the Gwich'in nation.

Promoting Intergenerational Transmission

In order to promote intergenerational transmission of the language, language use needs to begin at home between speakers who have a higher level of proficiency, learners, and children.

At the same time, schools should not be discounted; rather the school may be used as a link to what begins in the home (Fishman, 2007).

One of the questions posed to Maggie was that if she had a child, would she use the language with the child, and her answer was "try to". While Maggie does not currently have a high level of proficiency in Gwich'in, she would nonetheless like to speak the language to her children, which would also allow her to practice using the language.

Raavit, like Maggie, is of the age where intergenerational transmission did not occur because his parents' first language was English. However, one of his parents is a latent speaker of Gwich'in, and has shown an interest in learning the language and uses the language, to the best of her ability, with Raavit. This goes to show the importance of the role of latent speakers, especially if they take it upon themselves to practice speaking the language, which thereby provides an ideal chance for language learners such as Raavit to practice. When Raavit was asked that if he had any children in the future, would he use the language with the child, he relates his answer by saying "Yeah". This response, although only one syllable, indicates that he is willing to take to ensure that the language will be at least used with his future offspring.

Maggie and Raavit are relatively young language learners in their 20s, who have made the effort to actively learn the language by taking university Gwich'in language classes, and to sometimes practice with each other or others in the village. Their commitment is promising because it demonstrates to their peers what can be accomplished in learning the language if they also intended to learn the language as their own goal. The older generation, as expressed below, has expectations of the younger generations to speak the language.

Soozan, whose L1 is Gwich'in, notes that the younger generations are not learning to speak the language, which conveys that this is an expectation that she has of them to learn.

Instead, English is the first language of these younger generations. Soozan expresses in Excerpt 27 that it is disappointing that at least some of the younger generations do not know how to speak the language.

Excerpt 27

> I know they all speak in school English. I can't believe some of these kids don't know how to [1]speak Native.

The sentiment that Soozan brings up about younger generations learning their language is exactly the message that is being passed down to younger generations of Gwich'in. This is the same sentiment that is expressed by those younger Gwich'in who want to learn the language. They are not able to learn to speak the language in school; therefore, unable to speak with elders. However, this situation may be able to be reversed if the roles of people in Soozan's generation, who are speakers, can be utilized.

Another thought that Soozan expressed was that if a Gwich'in person lives in a Gwich'in village, they should learn the language so that it can be passed on to their Gwich'in children as she expresses in Excerpt 28.

Excerpt 28

> I think they [younger generations] should [know the language] if they're going to live here [Gwich'in village] and they got kids they're Gwich'in.

The above suggestion by Soozan speaks volumes about the wishes of her generation to pass on the second language identity of succeeding generations, thereby affording intergenerational language transmission. In addition, it has connotations of a sense of place and identity to language.

[1] To "speak Native" is a term that speakers that are more proficient use to refer to speaking a Native language. In this case, it refers to speaking Gwich'in.

Simon, whose L1 is Gwich'in, was part of a contingent of Gwich'in representatives who went to Hawai'i to obtain an understanding of how their language programs worked. He was impressed, as stated in Excerpt 29, that small Hawai'ian children were able to draw objects that related to their language.

Excerpt 29

> Well oondit [directional meaning across there] Hawaii little kid [indicates size of child] that big draw like that in everything.

Because of these interactions with the Hawai'ian programs about learning their language, Simon articulates that the language should be learned from the time a person is born. He believes (see Excerpt 30) that if babies are spoken to in Gwich'in it will be easier to teach them. He states that there are a few families in Fort Yukon who are doing this.

Excerpt 30

> KS: So you think it should be learned from beebii tsal gwats'an hee [from a small baby]?
> SFS: Ąįį gwats'an googwarah'è' [from that time if we teach them] more easy. Yaghà' [name of person] vigii nąįį [that (person) their kids]. [name of people] vigii nąįį dinjii zhuh k'yàa giginkhii [their kids speak in the way of Native] because … Teach them right from here (gesturing small child).

Simon is of the opinion that if language learning occurs, it should begin when they are babies. It would then become the child's first language because when they enter school, they will learn English no matter what happens. If Gwich'in becomes their first language, then it would make sense to initiate a strong form of bilingual education for the school.

Summary: Promoting intergenerational transmission.

Gwich'in are aware that intergenerational transmission of the language needs to occur from the infant stage of life. Starting at this young age, parents can learn right alongside their babies. For those who are speakers, speaking to the babies, other learners, and latent speakers

provides an excellent opportunity for practice. By beginning to speak, it will provide a sense of pride in their identity.

Besides the knowledge that intergenerational transmission of the language should take place, there are some participants who provide and receive positive support for other language learners.

Providing and Receiving Positive Support

Providing and receiving positive support for language learning is a key component because it serves as an uplifting experience for the language learner that creates opportunities for them to expand their repertoire of knowledge and context of language use. In addition, it instills pride and well-being for a language learner's identity. When positive support is provided or received, the support does not necessarily have to be confined to a proficient speaker because there are other mean in which can be utilized, such as the written form as some participants have expressed.

Maggie is supportive of younger language learners, such as her younger cousin by allowing her to use her university Gwich'in notes. She states in Excerpt 31 that her cousin really tries to make an effort at learning Gwich'in, and walks around with a large notebook of Gwich'in information.

Excerpt 31

> My cousin...she's got a big notebook of just Gwich'in stuff. She keeps her own notebook.

By sharing her notes with her younger cousin, Maggie is support if her younger cousin asks any questions by providing explanations (see Excerpt 32).

Excerpt 32

> She can look at my notes if she wants. If she did, she'd say "what's that one?"

It is a very generous gesture, on Maggie's part, to share her notes with a much younger person who wants to learn their ancestral language, Gwich'in.

In the above examples, Maggie, as a language learner and a supportive advocate, helps her younger cousin who is very much interested in learning the language. Through this type of support, Maggie is making a valuable contribution by being available to younger learners, and in this regard is reinforcing the role of promoting intergenerational transmission of the language.

Positive support can be polarizing, as in asking if one knows how to speak the language well enough to teach. Nationwide, there is a severe shortage of Native language teachers who are trained in tenets of second language acquisition or teaching (Oller & Littlebear, 2007). As a Gwich'in language teacher, I can verify that Alaska is in the same situation. Once other advanced-level proficient speakers discover that your job is a Native language teacher, these speakers sometimes "test" you to ascertain how well you can speak the language. This is the sort of language verification that Allan experienced in his role as a Native language teacher, as in Excerpt 33. Allan relays that he was unexpectedly "tested" by another more proficient speaker.

Excerpt 33

> Nahgwan dąį' [very proficient Gwich'in speaker] [Not too long ago] "Dinjii zhuh k'yàa gaanandaii (changes voice to reflect roughness of asking)?" shahnyaa." [very proficient Gwich'in speaker asked me, "Do you know how to speak in the Native way?"] "Àahà'" vaihnyaa ts'à' "łyâa gwinzįį ginkhii" shahnyaa. [I told him "yes." and he said "You really speak well."]

In this case, the more proficient speaker was satisfied and gave a positive comment. As a language learner, these types of positive responses made Allan feel very proud, and in this way provided support.

Native language teaching, Soozan believes, can be taught anywhere, especially if people already know how to speak Gwich'in, as she expresses in Excerpt 34.

Excerpt 34

> Well they can teach them anywhere. Like you, you're teaching them how to speak. Anybody can do that if they know [2]Indian first. [Gwich'in language]. They can teach it.

Furthermore, in Excerpt 34, Soozan refers to me as a language instructor that teaches students to speak in the language because she is aware that I teach at the university level. In this way, Soozan portrays a positive outlook about how the language can be taught and learned.

Summary: Providing and receiving positive support.

Receiving and providing positive support encourage language learning and teaching.

The above are themes that have emerged, which are: (1) improving language proficiency; (2) expressing desire to learn Gwich'in; (3) utilizing formal education; (4) employing activities other than language; (5) promoting intergenerational transmission, and (6) providing and receiving positive support. All of these themes are examples of what various participants or the main participants have experienced or done, but this is not to say that they have been without challenges. The next set of themes that emerged will focus on some reasons as to why there has been a deficit in the area of Gwich'in language learning or teaching. The following themes emerged that point to hindrances of language learning or teaching: (1) lack of opportunities for speaking; (2) peers are not interested; and (3) lack of language teachers and bilingual classes.

Lack of Opportunities for Speaking and Support

As a student at a university, Maggie took it upon herself to enroll in the university Gwich'in language class. However, she points out in Excerpt 35, that once she went back to the village, that townspeople do not actively speak Gwich'in, nor is it taught as a subject.

[2] "Indian" is a term that older Gwich'in use to refer to their race in Alaska.

Excerpt 35

…nobody else speaks it really. It's not that taught.

This makes it difficult for her to keep on learning what she had learned at the university because there is no one for her to rely on to practice speaking the language.

If the language is not taught in the home or school, and not spoken in the village, then there is a good chance that those who are language learners do not have the opportunity for practice to continue their language learning. Without other interlocutors, Maggie is not able to practice her speaking skills despite her desire to do so because she is dependent on the choices of others. Twenty-year-old Raavit expresses the same outlook regarding the chance to practice using the amount of Gwich'in he had learned at the university.

When Raavit was asked if he spoke any Gwich'in, he answered that he spoke a little bit of Gwich'in. Again, like Maggie, being able to speak "a little bit" indicates that there is a lack of opportunities to practice what he had learned with most community members where he resides. However Raavit does speak Gwich'in with some of his family members as he relates in Excerpt 36. In particular, with one of his parents who resides in the community, and one of his grandparents, whom he sees once or twice per year.

Excerpt 36

[I speak with] my Mom and grandmother.

This means that he is speaking with his Mom, who is also a Gwich'in language learner, as an opportunity to work on his proficiency. In essence, Raavit has to rely on speakers in the village, because he has to depend on them for practice in speaking by adding to his proficiency level. However, even though Raavit speaks with his Mom, and occasionally with his grandmother, he also used the language with an older man in the village whom he apparently impressed. In this

discourse with the older man in Excerpt 37, the way in which this person was impressed was not by direct praise about language use, but his inference that Raavit was a "full-blooded" Indian, which could have been a result of Raavit's ability to use the language.

Excerpt 37

> I was talking to him [in the language]. He's like "I don't care what they say. You're full-blooded to me.

Therefore, I asked him, "full-blooded what?", and Raavit shyly and laughingly said "Indian." My response to him regarding Excerpt 37 was, "That must have made you feel good." Raavit said, "Yeah." This positive emotion must have felt empowering to Raavit because of his willingness to speak with an older Gwich'in man that generated an unexpected positive response. It begs to answer the question of what this older man meant by "full-blooded [Indian]". The idea of "blood quantum" is a colonial ideology to define identity for American Indians. Originally, the term was used for "mixed blood" people. The idea of "blood quantum", despite its racist connotations, has been adopted by many tribes to establish membership in a tribe (Schmidt, 2011). Raavit appears to be of "mixed blood", but his identity was boosted by the older Gwich'in man's comment that he was a "full-blooded [Indian]".

Rochelle, one of the main participants, also expresses the fact that she needs a lot of practice in the language to increase her proficiency level. In Excerpt 38, Rochelle points out that even though she can understand much of what is being said in the language, she really needs many opportunities for practice in using the language, as she points out that she has a lot to learn in the language.

Excerpt 38

> I need lots of practice. Really bad. I mean I can get by barely. I have lots to learn but I can understand.

Rochelle's expresses the need to practice, presumably through speaking to elders that are more proficient or other language learners. A lack of opportunity to practice speaking the language is a hindrance for Rochelle's language learning, since she is dependent on others in her own quest to learn the language.

Young people like Maggie, Raavit, and Rochelle find it frustrating that not many people speak the language to them, but the same can be said for other generations of language learners, such as 40-year-old Allan. Allan says that the known Gwich'in speakers look at him "funny" when he tries to engage them in speaking Gwich'in. Even though Allan is trying his best to speak Gwich'in, opportunities do not abound to practice with known speakers because of their attitude regarding the use of Gwich'in. Thompson (1984) explains that this type of attitude is social in nature, and that the "negative attitudes of other segments of society can influence people to feel badly about their own native language, causing conflict and confusion within the individual." (p. 11).

Despite these attitudes, Allan is persistent in his quest to speak Gwich'in with these known Gwich'in speakers (see Excerpt 39), and is insistent on using the language even if they do not want to speak the language.

Excerpt 39

Because people even though they know how to talk [Gwich'in] they don't.

Since Allan is sometimes unable to get known speakers to speak with him in Gwich'in, he is persistent with them so that they will use the language.

As an older language learner, I am aware of most of the people who speak Gwich'in. For me, being around these speakers provides me with an ideal situation to practice or to ask questions. However, when known speakers are addressed in Gwich'in, most of the time they will

answer back in English. I find that even if many of the known speakers initially respond in English, they eventually switch to using Gwich'in, especially if they notice that I am insistent on using Gwich'in. For instance, I have an older sister whose L1 is Gwich'in, so when we talk, she will initially use English, and then Gwich'in as she realizes that I am not using English with her. Having skills as a second language instructor of Gwich'in is useful as a tool for steering people into using Gwich'in, and in this way, helps foster the use of the language. A good example of getting others to use the Gwich'in language happened at a time when I was in a Canadian Gwich'in village, where I met an aunt that spoke only English to me all day, even though I spoke only Gwich'in to her. By the end of the evening, she was speaking only Gwich'in to me, but only because I had to be very persistent in using the language. Another time, I used the language with another person at the university, but since I was such a new learner, she reverted to using only English. These are two concrete examples of how practice in the language can sway known speakers to use the language, but in the first situation, I was a stronger speaker, and in the second situation, I was a beginner without much experience in using the language. However, practice in using the language also helped to promote my proficiency level.

Lack of Support

Allan teaches high school students and relates in Excerpt 40 that although younger students want to learn the language, there are no speakers who are willing to teach them which he relates is the reason for their lack of using the language.

> Excerpt 40
>
> Like just today I was working with some students and their story is that elders don't take the time to teach them. They don't make the effort so that's why they don't speak. They want to but nobody is teaching them. So there's that desire there.

As a researcher, I have also realized as a latent speaker that I had very little support from more proficient speakers as discussed in Excerpt 41, possibly because they think people who understand the language should know how to speak already. They do not understand that that is not always the case. I found that there is a negative attitude and lack of support from more proficient speakers when attempting to speak the language. It is one thing to understand the language, but speaking takes another skill, which requires practice and patience as a language learner. In addition, providing and receiving positive support from more proficient speakers would be constructive.

Excerpt 41

> There's no support mechanism… This is a contrary experience because …even while in the same breath people are saying "we need to learn our languages."

Summary: Lack of opportunities for speaking and support.

Language learning can use agency and persistence to create language learning opportunities. Although I have created a second language identity by learning how to speak, I could just have easily quit the process of learning because of contradictory attitudes and non-support. As a language learner, hearing two conflicting messages about language learning sends an awkward message.

Another complication that comes up as far as speaking is that peers do not seem interested in learning the language.

Peers not Interested

Friends who speak or who are learning the language are important because when you interact with them, you use language to communicate that you would not otherwise use with someone older or younger. Everybody has friends with different personalities, aspirations, and likes or dislikes which contribute to the repertoire of people we know. Considering this, when it

comes to language learning, not everyone is interested in this activity, for it is a process that requires one to be actively involved through interaction and communication. Maggie found this out firsthand when she attempted to involve her friends in her language learning. Her friends did not appear to be interested, nor did they want to hear it spoken, or have it explained to them (see Excerpt 40). At the same time, if Maggie insists on using the language with her peers, she runs the risk of potentially being rejected by her friends for speaking Gwich'in. Maggie says:

> Excerpt 40
>
> None of my friends don't know it. They don't talk it. Everyone seem like they don't want to hear it, like the explanation of it.

This makes one wonder why some people, especially these younger people who are themselves Gwich'in, are not even remotely interested in hearing or understanding the language. An unintentional wall has been put up between Maggie's friends and her regarding the use of the language. However, friends with whom to communicate are important at this age group and Maggie needs others with whom to speak.

Insofar as attitudes, this lack of peer interaction for language learning also highlights people like Maggie who have made a personal choice to learn and speak the language, thereby bridging the gap between generations. This requires a strong conviction for learning her ancestral language despite the lack of peers with whom she can speak the language. Raavit, who is also in the same age group as Maggie, also experiences the same type of attitude from his peers.

Part of language learning entails language practice, and Raavit's own peers, as he says in Excerpt 41, do not show an interest in the Gwich'in language. This makes it difficult for him to interact with his peers in the language. In fact, when he does speak Gwich'in to his peers, they do not know what language Raavit is speaking, and he has to explain to them that he is speaking Gwich'in.

Excerpt 41

> When I say some stuff to some of my friends around here, they don't know what the heck I'm talking about. I keep telling them it's Gwich'in. They don't know.

When Raavit's own peers do not express an interest in the language and Raavit wants to speak to them, it must be a frustrating and helpless feeling about the future of the language. This lack of interest on the part of his peers could be a reflection of attitude towards the language. Compounded by the lack of interest by peers of the language is that there is a severe shortage of trained language teachers for bilingual classes.

Summary: Peers not interested.

What is evident is that language learners need a community or peers with whom to practice.

Lack of Language Teachers and Bilingual Classes

There is a shortage of language teachers in the bilingual classes in the K-12 school systems. The bilingual teachers that are currently in these jobs speak Gwich'in as their L1, were recruited because they are very proficient speakers, and have not had any courses that relate to second language teaching and learning methods. As a result, it is difficult to understand how to engage the students so that they progress developmentally in the bilingual classes in their language learning. If the teachers had a foundation of second language teaching and learning methods, this may prove to be a rewarding endeavor in their experiences for them and for the students. This lack of engagement and enjoyable interaction with the students creates an atmosphere where the bilingual classes are not taken seriously, as Maggie relates below.

As stated earlier, the attitudes that Maggie's peers have could have been compounded in the school during the times that they attended bilingual classes. Bilingual classes are purportedly part of the school curricula and used to promote Native language learning but in reality, bilingual

classes are more about culture than being bilingual. As a result, most of the students in these bilingual classes do not take them as a serious subject. Maggie points out in Excerpt 42 that one of her relatives was in bilingual class and revealed the following to her:

Excerpt 42

> She was in bilingual but she says that nobody else really pays attention and anything.

It is almost a "catch-22" situation because since the language teachers have no training, they are not aware of how to have a successful classroom for the students and to hold their interest in Gwich'in language use. When students are not captivated or engaged, they become bored as she says in Excerpt 43 and then the student wonders why they are even in the bilingual classroom.

Excerpt 43

> It's not that big in school [bilingual class]. Most of those kids probably don't want to learn. They say "why are we doing this?"

In addition, peers have negative attitudes towards the language, which may be fueled by the fact that bilingual classes are not taken seriously.

In the bilingual classes that are taught in the K-12 schools throughout the Gwich'in villages, Allan states the focus of these classes are on individual vocabulary as in Excerpt 44.

Excerpt 44

> It [bilingual classes] was taught in the school but really it was vocabulary and that's about it.

For Allan, learning individual vocabulary in the bilingual classes does not amount to learning to speak the language.

Summary: Lack of language teachers and bilingual classes.

Strong bilingual programs and teacher education are need to lay the foundation for Gwich'in language learning, which are engaging and meaningful with the goal of achieving proficiency in the language.

In sum, language learners or teachers for some of the participants are in a problematic situation because of contradictory messages that are being conveyed by various community members, especially from those who are at the youngest and eldest spectrums of Gwich'in society. This dichotomy stems from at least 50 years of non-intergenerational language transmission, which then affects attitudes that are not conducive towards those attempting to learn the language.

The above themes are examples of personal experiences of some of the participants in this study; however, there are also social variables that have contributed to the ongoing language loss through as the following theme on language status and attitudes.

Status of Language and Attitudes

The status of a language can be either high or low, and is linked to attitudes about the language (Crawford, 2007). In our society, English is a language of high status, and is favored over Gwich'in, because it is spoken and used in every dimension of our lives, whereas Gwich'in is limited and used only by a few people and the elders. As a language learner, some of the participants have experienced negative comments and attitudes towards the Gwich'in language.

Allan has come to the realization that the Gwich'in language has a low status (see Excerpt 45) because negative comments can affect the desire to speak.

Excerpt 45

> other times I might be speaking and someone might say it just sounds like gobbledegook. Or there are some other ignorant comment. Just not realizing what they're talking about. Belittling the language.

In Allan's experiences with speaking around the public, he indicates in Excerpt 45 that the language sounds unintelligible to some people because of their lack of knowledge about the language. By hearing these types of comments, Allan realizes that the Gwich'in language holds a low status in the public. The awareness that the language is not respected can affect Allan's identity as a Gwich'in person because might result in learners being hesitant to use the language in public, leading to fewer opportunities to practice speaking the language.

Insofar as attitudes, Odin realizes that the generations before him have attitudes about learning Gwich'in, because they had experienced assimilation. One of these people was his mother, which affected their attitudes about passing the language on. Odin expressed this in Excerpt 46 by saying that his grandparents and their children were told it was better to just learn English and succeed in the world than to try to pass the language or even cultural norms, such as making fish weirs, on to subsequent generations.

Excerpt 46

> There were already western things that existed and so predating quite a few generations now, you probably have those things starting to exist where they're [at contact] saying "forget about those clothes, forget about this or that and that" and that being actually passed down.

Indeed, if one reads about Gwich'in life from various points of view, then the change is apparent at all levels of the culture, including the language (McKennan, 1965; Osgood, 1970; Pfisterer, 1992; Sapir, 1982). Languages are not static in nature because it is part of a living culture that goes through time. As time passes, so do living conditions of the present. Over time,

languages begin to change to adjust to present living conditions. For instance, in the lifetime of my parents, living conditions were nomadic. They were at one with nature, and followed the animals for sustenance. In my generation, my parents had to adjust to living in one community for an extended period of time, mostly because attending school was compulsory for their children. With this adjustment, they had to learn new language that went with the times. Language can also begin to ebb as time moves forward, especially if there are attitudes about the status, even by speakers of the language.

Allan has also received negative comments from advanced-level speakers (see Excerpt 47), as in the exchange that took place between him and another speaker.

Excerpt 47

> Sometimes not so good things. Like I was talking to my [relative]. I made some stupid mistake and [s/he] said "I don't speak Cheyenne!!" [S/he's] not too generous sometimes with [her/his comments] because [s/he's] a better speaker than I am.

This is an undesirable situation for Allan and other language learners in general because it can make him feel intimidated about attempting to speak. Clearly, when Allan and other language learners in general receive positive reinforcement about speaking Gwich'in, it adds to his identity as a Gwich'in speaker. In addition, receiving positive comments propels Allan forward in his own language learning attempts, which can in turn, lead to positive repercussions for other language learners that he encounters or tries to help.

Summary: Status of language and attitudes.

Negative attitudes need to change so that the status of the Gwich'in language will reflect a sense of pride.

The above themes have emerged from the data of the background participants, and provide the setting of language learning for the main participants. The themes pose complications associated with learning Gwich'in as a second language due to historical reasons of language and cultural shift. To see a more complete list of types of topics discussed for language learning and the contradictory conditions that have been encountered, see Appendix D. Although the above themes may be hindrances for learning Gwich'in, most of these same participants have taken a stance to learn Gwich'in through various means. This will be the next set of data that will be investigated.

In sum, the background participants provide a mise en scène for the main participants. They include how intergenerational transmission of the Gwich'in language ceased to take place before the age of 70 when schools were introduced, and English became the lingua franca. The effects of language shift to English made it problematic to learn Gwich'in. For example, although all of the background participants who were 50 years of age and younger had a desire to learn Gwich'in; they encountered contradictions such as a lack of opportunities to practice using the language with more proficient speakers. In spite of less than ideal learning environment and contradictions, some background participants have succeeded in, or are in the process of learning their ancestral language by various means, such as taking the university Gwich'in language class. They also attempt to use the language with others who are known learners or speakers. It is within this atmosphere and framework that the two main participants are situated. Their stories will be the next topic of this research.

Main Participant—30-year-old Rochelle

Rochelle is 30 years old and was raised in both Fort Yukon and Beaver where she has family and friends. As a result, she considers both villages her hometown on an equal basis.

Parents who did not speak Gwich'in raised Rochelle, as she relates in Excerpt 48. One of the parents may have understood a little bit of Gwich'in, but the other parent did not understand in the language. The grandparents on her mother's side did not speak Gwich'in because her grandmother was Japanese and Eskimo, and her grandfather, a highly proficient speaker of Gwich'in, passed away when she was very young. Her grandmother on her father's side did not speak Gwich'in because she was a latent speaker, meaning that she understood the language but did not actively speak the language with others. Rochelle did not consider such a latent speaker to be a "speaker" per se. Her grandfather, although he was a speaker, did not use the language with her or any family members who did not use or understand the language.

Excerpt 48

> I never really had anyone who fluently spoke around while I was growing up. Not in my house. My parents don't speak or understand. My grandparents, well one is Japanese and Eskimo and then my grampa Johnny died when I was young. He was probably one of the most fluent speakers. My gramma Babe she only understands and my grampa Clifford didn't really speak to us. There was no speakers around me.

Rochelle went to K-12 school in Beaver, Fairbanks and Fort Yukon, and then later to Mt. Edgecumbe High School in Sitka for two of her high school years. Mt. Edgecumbe High School is a boarding school that was opened by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1947 in Sitka, Alaska, which is located in southeast Alaska. It is approximately 732 air miles from Fort Yukon. When the school first opened, many of Alaska's Native children were forced to attend this school from a large number of Native communities throughout Alaska. Now, students from throughout Alaska have the option to attend this school. The school enrolls over 400 students who represent 111 communities from throughout Alaska with the student population being 79% Alaska Native (retrieved May 11, 2018 from http://www.mehs.us/about_us).

Rochelle graduated from high school in Fort Yukon. During high school, Rochelle attended three years of bilingual classes where she had positive experiences in learning and doing cultural activities such as sewing, beading, drinking tea, eating and visiting. After graduating from high school, she went to the Institute of American Indian arts school in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and then took a little time off to have her daughter. When she completed the art school, she moved back to Alaska with her partner and children to be near family. They eventually moved to Fairbanks where Rochelle obtained her baccalaureate in Art with a minor in Native Languages from the University of Alaska Fairbanks in 2000.

Rochelle has three young children and raises them in both Beaver and Anchorage. She works and lives in Anchorage during the school year, and spends the summers in Beaver with her children and family where they live off the land. In Alaska, to "live off the land" means to be able to sustain a family with seasonal foods that are harvested on one's ancestral land. For example, June and July are the months when King Salmon are harvested and prepared for winter by various methods, such as smoking, drying, or jarring them. In July, berries that are part of the Gwich'in homelands, are harvested. In the interior of Alaska where Rochelle is from, blueberries and cranberries are the main types of berries that are picked and stored for the winter months. September is the time when moose is hunted, harvested and prepared for the winter months. Living off the land in the villages is necessary because of the extraordinary costs of fuel, freight and food. At the time of this research, the price of heating fuel in the interior region of Alaska, which are not on the road system, could cost anywhere from $3.85 to $10.00 per gallon. (Retrieved May 11, 2018 from https://www.commerce.alaska.gov/web/Portals/4/pub/Fuel_Price_Report_Jul_2013.pdf). In order to be part of today's cash economy, Rochelle supplements her income through a small

business, which features her artwork, media, graphic design, and promotion of the Gwich'in language.

The data for Rochelle's profile was collected on June 28, 2010 and July 2, 2010. The interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes each resulting in 53 pages of coded transcripts. The analysis revealed the following themes for language learning (1) expressing desire to learn Gwich'in; (2) bilingual classes; (3) lack of opportunities to practice speaking, and (4) need for support and positive atmosphere. In addition Rochelle's subthemes reveal the following (1) promoting intergenerational transmission; (2) positive attitude; (3) emerging proficiency, and (4) beyond language. Figure 4.1 below provides an overview of the themes for learning Gwich'in.

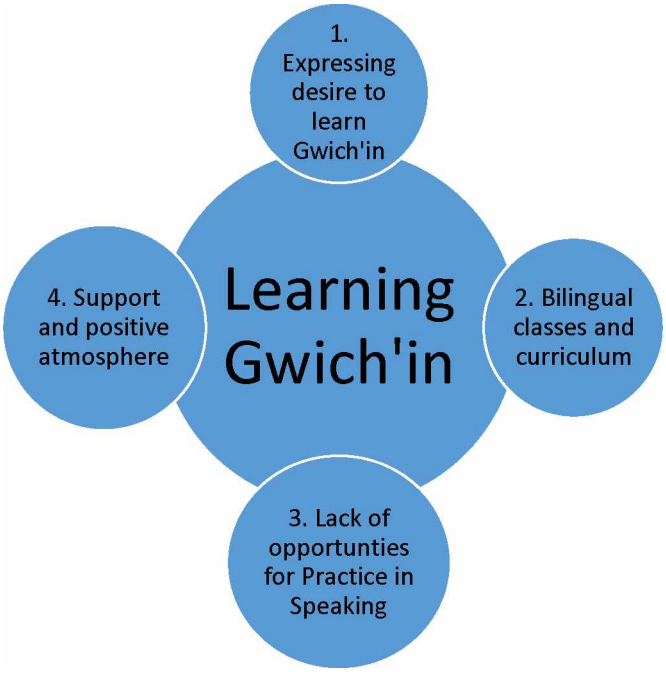

Figure 4.1. Themes for Learning Gwich'in for 30 year old Rochelle.

(1) *Expressing desire to learn Gwich'in.* As a young child before the age of ten, Rochelle became aware that one of her grandmothers spoke a lot of Gwich'in, and she always wanted to know what she was saying. One of her cousins who was close in age lived under the same roof with their grandmother, and understood some of her grandmother's questions, such as "who is

that?", and she would answer back. In Excerpt 49 below, Rochelle is reflecting on the experience of observing exchanges between her Grandmother and her cousin and wanting to understand and participate.

> Excerpt 49
> My gramma probably spoke the most that I was around and just hearing her and then people would know what she was saying and I was like "Man! I want to know what she's saying." I remember she would speak and say "Jùu dèe?" [who?] and then [cousin] would say "Oh. That's somebody's vigii [his/her child]." and I was like "How does SHE know what she's saying?" I was like "Man! I want to know." She's a month older than me but she was raised with gramma. They lived under the same roof."

As much as Rochelle wanted to learn the language, this was difficult because there were no other people in her life who spoke the language, making it impossible for her to learn the language at a young age. It is also worth pointing out that the slightly older cousin was able to understand her Grandmother, a fact, not lost on Rochelle even at her young age. She realized that living with her grandmother allowed her cousin to learn Gwich'in. "She's a month older than me but she was raised with gramma." While Rochelle, did not have the same opportunity for intergenerational transmission of the language (see Excerpt 50 below), this early experience may have pointed her to a desire to study the language later, as she did when she enrolled in university Gwich'in classes.

When Rochelle enrolled at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, she was delighted to see that there were Gwich'in language classes being offered. She stated that the reason that she wanted to enroll was because she had always wanted to learn how to speak Gwich'in, and now that she had the chance, she decided she had to enroll. Excerpt 50 shows her excitement about discovering that the Gwich'in language was taught at the university level and also that she should walk the talk by learning the language, instead of passing up the opportunity.

Excerpt 50

> Oh! I just JUMPED at the opportunity because I always wanted to learn. I've always wanted to learn Gwich'in and I remember thinking just what my friends tell me now "oh! I've ALWAYS wanted to learn." Everyone always says that, and I always said that too. And soon as I seen that chance I just jumped at it because it seemed like a good place to learn while I'm in college and I could get a degree in it and get college credit and it would work towards my bachelors. So I just jumped at the opportunity.

In this passage we see not only that in Rochelle's mind the motivation to learn represented a longstanding desire, but that the idea that learning was valuable was reinforced in the community-- "everyone always says that." The passage also shows that she perceives that a formal university setting is an appropriate place to learn Gwich'in.

The following section discusses some of the background leading up to Rochelle's decision to take classes at the university level. It tells of her experiences in and reflections on attending bilingual classes in her high school years.

(2) *Bilingual classes and curriculum.* Bilingual classes are taught in k-12 schools throughout the Gwich'in villages in Alaska. In Excerpt 51 Rochelle explains that in her experience, the focus of these bilingual classes was on cultural activities, such as beading. Furthermore, as she describes it, whenever the language was used, it was limited to using single word vocabulary.

Excerpt 51

> …in Fort Yukon I always took [Name's] bilingual class. It was like for an hour a day. We used to just kind of go hang out. We just went and ate crackers and drank tea and did beadwork and learned Gwich'in words. I just learned like one word not in any context or anything. Just like "gishreiin'aii" [it is sunny] or like the really basic stuff from bilingual.

Learning "words not in any context," as Rochelle described it would do little to facilitate having a conversation in any language. Her enrolling in the bilingual classes was an early expression of her desire to learn, but she understood that learning single words was not learning to converse.

It is evident in Excerpt 52, in which Rochelle is reflecting on a trip she took with a contingent of Gwich'in elders and educators to Hawa'ii for the purpose of looking at their language programs, that she feels that meaningful Gwich'in language learning means being able to speak and converse. She points out, that for this to be possible, there needs to be in place an idea of what topics should be addressed.

Excerpt 52

> What I think was interesting was I think we kinda just had this idea "oh. We'll just start speaking." But one thing I realized when we went there [HI] is what are we going to speak about? That really opened my eyes because like in their colleges they have just a whole semester you can take like Hawai'ian ethnobotany. Or like zoology, genealogy. All WHOLE class just learning about "shizhehk'aa nąįį [my family] and shalak nąįį" [my relatives] and we could easily have a class like that where you just learn all kinship.

Rochelle was clearly impressed by the Hawai'ian situation, where an entire semester at the university is devoted to one subject, such as ethnobotany. In contrast, in her experience, the Gwich'in do not have a meaningful curriculum to address specific topics. She even offers the idea to create a semester long class about the topic of kinship.

Given Rochelle's family situation, school based programs, such as bilingual bicultural (BLBC) programs are one of the few options for learning their language. However, in Rochelle's recollection the goals in this program were not focused on proficiency based language learning.

The name of the program implies that the program goals are at least, in part, to develop bilingual language skills in the students. As evidenced by Rochelle's experience, however, the program's curriculum focused heavily on the cultural rather than the linguistic component. For a

young person interested in learning her ancestral language who is participating in such a program this sends, at best, mixed signals. These mixed signals could be that the language cannot, should not or need not be learned. This discussion of BLBC programs is also an example of how heritage language learners are frequently confronted with contradictory signals: (a) it is important to learn, but family members do not speak, and (b) Gwich'in should be taught in the school, but the classes do not support meaningful language learning.

Opportunities for learners to speak and thereby focus on developing language proficiency is also the focus of the next section.

(3) *Lack of opportunities for practice in speaking.* Rochelle points out that those students who are learning Gwich'in as a second language must work hard. In Excerpt 53, she points out that they need ample opportunities for practice in using the language.

Excerpt 53

I need lots of practice. Really bad. I mean I can get by barely.

While Rochelle's experience of being able to comprehend more than she can produce is typical of most language learners, she also expresses the need to practice, presumably through speaking to elders that are more proficient or other language learners. Again, this creates a problematic situation for Rochelle's language learning, since other speakers or learners do not surround her in her own quest to learn the language. We will see in the next section, how this need to interact with more proficient speakers can make learning difficult, as attitudes often impact her as a language learner. These points to the need for a supportive environment for language learners.

(4) *Support and positive atmosphere.* As Rochelle points out in Excerpt 54, generations before her need to become aware of their attitudes, and how language learners perceive them. In Excerpt 6 Rochelle expresses a sense of negativity she perceives in some elders.

Excerpt 54

> it seems like the generation before us is really negative [about language learning] or maybe like our grandparents age.

She substantiates this impression based on her experience on the trip to Hawai'i previously mentioned. Rochelle was the driver for one of two groups on a daily basis, and she heard many complaints and negativity [see Excerpt 55] from some of the participants, and although it was contrary to what she believed about speaking up to those who are older than she is, she felt she just had to say something to make them aware of their attitudes.

Excerpt 55

> I was a driver and so I had the same group in my car and they were always complaining about everything. And you know I held off for a few days because those are my elders and I didn't want to speak bad to them. But I thought I had to say something and I said "That's the thing. If we're going to make this language immersion work, then we're all going to have to stick together and be supportive and quit being so negative with each other. And I said "That's why it's so hard for us to learn our language. That there's too many people trying to make fun of you or not supporting you."

She stressed that to be positive and "stick together and be supportive" gives everyone a chance to work together for language immersion. Rochelle remembers how she expressed to them that language learners need support and a positive atmosphere in which to learn but the contradiction that arises is that there is too much negativity. Again, these are mixed signals: young people are expected or encouraged to learn the language, but at the same time discouraged from doing so. Rochelle makes the point that support or lack thereof can make or break the success of a language learner. In Excerpt 56 Rochelle expresses the need for younger language learners to bring fresh vitality to the arena of language learning, and reiterates the issue of supporting language learners.

Excerpt 56

> We need some young people in there. Some fresh ideas. We do all need to be supportive of each other.

In this passage, support means not just refraining from criticizing but responding positively to suggestions and ideas. In the absence of supportive elders, Rochelle is calling upon her own peer group to work together and act as a support and learning network.

As a language learner who is attempting to speak the language, Rochelle has experienced negativity from some speakers in the form of laughter and lack of support. However, as she explains in Excerpt 57, because of her desire to learn Gwich'in, one of her defense mechanisms for learning the language is to see past those remarks or laughter that could easily bruise the self-esteem of any language learner.

Excerpt 57

> That's how it is too when you're trying to learn Gwich'in because there's a lot of people who will just kind of laugh at you and you just have to get past that.

Since so few Alaska Natives succeed in learning their ancestral language and Rochelle has demonstrated some level of success, this ability to shrug off negative comments and seek out supportive voices might be one key to overcoming less than ideal conditions for language learning. This next section will focus more on how Rochelle became a successful language learner. Themes in this section are (1) intergenerational transmission; (2) positive attitudes; (3) emerging proficiency, and (4) beyond language, each of which will be explained below (see Figure 4.2 below). The following section will cover the theme of being a successful language

learner and its various subthemes.

Figure 4.2. Being a Successful Language Learner.

(1) *Intergenerational transmission.* When Rochelle was the itinerant art teacher in the Yukon Flats School District (YFSD), in eight Alaskan Gwich'in villages, she integrated use of the Gwich'in language and instilling a sense of pride in the students. It is evident in Excerpt 58 that Rochelle feels that it is important for Gwich'in children to learn from their own people because it shows them that their identity is uniquely their own.

Excerpt 58

> I talked about who I am and I always introduce myself in Gwich'in and then just a little bit about me and my history. And then I showed them artwork that I've done. I just wanted to show the kids that there's all the different kinds of artwork and ways to express yourself and ways to use art as a tool and media. And I just wanted to open their perspective on our Gwich'in communities and like a global sense. One of the projects that we did was we would just draw a little picture but we would think about what makes our village special in the whole world. Because there's not places like this. There's nowhere really like this in the world where we can go hunting and get our own food and stuff. So I always try to just keep a whole global perspective on us as Gwich'in people. And so I would talk to the kids like that and you know I would just be another Gwich'in person and it

> was lots of fun. Those kids always really liked me. I have lots of little friends. They would see me around in the village "Hi Rochelle." and always want me to visit them and stuff.

Rochelle reports that she used every opportunity she could to speak Gwich'in when she worked as an itinerant artist for the Yukon Flats School District. Rochelle has a clear vision for her role as itinerant art teacher in predominantly Gwich'in communities. This role extends beyond that of most art teachers into the areas of language and identity. Rochelle also explains the strong connection to place that she, as a Gwich'in person from the area, can draw upon to make learning meaningful to the students. Rochelle seems keenly aware of her position, as a Gwich'in person working for the school district. Furthermore, she is using her role as a teacher to support the Gwich'in language, to foster positive images of "our Gwich'in communities", and to provide a "whole global perspective on us as Gwich'in people". It seems evident from this particular Excerpt 58, particularly through her use of the phrases "our Gwich'in communities" and "us as Gwich'in people" that Rochelle sees her identity as a Gwich'in person teaching in Gwich'in villages as a key factor in her teaching. She seems very aware, in this particular context, and is using it to foster positive attitudes and outlooks in the children she teaches – very much echoing her statements in Excerpt 59, encouraging the elders to be positive and supportive. She is taking on the role of providing and receiving positive support to the next generation even though she did or does not always receive this support herself. Rather than simply reliving her own past, she is shaping a more positive future. This too, might be important to her own success as a learner—the focus is not solely on herself, but also on future generations.

Being an itinerant teacher, Rochelle has taken advantage of her itinerant status to use her travel to the various Gwich'in villages as an opportunity to interact with elders and other more proficient speakers, as evidenced in Excerpt 59.

Excerpt 59

> I really used that opportunity when I was the itinerant artist for the Yukon Flats. I used that opportunity every time I went to all the villages and traveled. I always spoke. I asked people to speak to me and I told them I was learning and stuff. And so I got practice. I had that alone time with myself so I would go out and visit elders and meet people in the community.

Another thing Rochelle specifically mentions in Excerpt 59 above is that she asked people to speak to her in the language because she is in the process of learning the language. From Rochelle's interviews, it is apparent that she is taking every opportunity to learn Gwich'in through seeking out speakers that she sees a need for providing and receiving positive support and encouragement to be given to language learners such as herself and that she is offering positive support for those she is teaching herself. Her desire to learn Gwich'in seems present in her pursuits and her university studies are no exception.

As mentioned earlier, Rochelle enrolled in university Gwich'in language classes taught by the researcher because learning the language is something that she had always wanted to do. This occurred when she was looking through the list of classes at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, and was delighted to see that a Beginning Gwich'in Athabascan language class was being offered. In Excerpt 60 Rochelle shares her excitement about the opportunity to take Gwich'in classes at UAF. In an unexpected way, the university offered her what she had been searching for; a safe place to study the language, an instructor to help her and a community of learners. She took full advantage of this opportunity.

Excerpt 60

> I just jumped at it because it seemed like a good place to learn while I'm in college.

Upon this discovery, she enrolled in the class and completed the full two years of beginning and intermediate Gwich'in language courses. These classes are rigorous and demanding, but

Rochelle persevered, and had such a hunger for learning her ancestral language that she insisted on taking individual study courses in Gwich'in. These individual study courses focused on practical applications of language teaching and learning, and on doing research for Gwich'in documentation. In all, Rochelle completed 22 credits of Gwich'in, and even though this course of study was not the focus of her degree, she received a minor in a "foreign language". Taking these university classes allowed her to learn speaking, writing, reading, emergent grammar, teaching, learning, and research skills in the area of Gwich'in studies, which allowed her to move forward in her language development. Interestingly, the university class was able to help her work towards proficiency. While some question the role of formal education in the context of language revitalization, in Rochelle's case, the university Gwich'in class was a major factor to feed her hunger for more language and culture.

In Excerpt 61 Rochelle once more states her desire to learn the language.

Excerpt 61

> You know I feel like I didn't have much to begin with. But what I did have was I wanted to [learn the language]. I wanted to learn and I have deep respect for the culture.

While recognizing her limited access to language through intergenerational transmission, because no one in her family spoke and taught Gwich'in to her as a child, she repeatedly indicated that she "wanted to learn". She is also making a connection between learning the language and a "deep respect for the culture". It could be argued that for Rochelle learning her own ancestral language is connected to issues of culture and identity.

In Excerpt 62 we can see how studying Gwich'in at the university, maybe for the first time, provided a community of learners for Rochelle.

Excerpt 62

> Your class was hard though. I don't know how I did it. 5 credit classes. We all pushed each other too because we used to all study together. [I] remember with [name] and [name]. They used to come visit me and we would study. We [university Gwich'in students of various backgrounds] worked HARD too in that class. Really hard.

The small community of the learners in the course responded to the "hard" class with "hard" work together. Rochelle was a dedicated student in her university Gwich'in class and she had at least two other individuals she identifies as visiting and studying with her and working hard to learn the language. These studying ethics contributed to Rochelle as a successful student in her classes. She very humbly pointed out, as in Excerpt 63, that the classes allowed her to "hold a basic conversation and understand."

Excerpt 63

I can hold a basic conversation and understand.

Rochelle is a very successful language learner and being able to participate in basic conversations and being able to understand most of what is said around her in Gwich'in is a very meaningful accomplishment for her or any language learner. What is significant here, is that Rochelle actively pursued her goal to learn the language through a variety of means and that unlike so many of her peers who share her desire to learn the language, she is one who now holds a level of proficiency that allows her entrance into further conversations with speakers.

The final Excerpt in this section, Excerpt 64, indicates that Rochelle sees a larger context for her own Gwich'in language learning. She wants to ensure the transmission of Gwich'in language and identity to the next generation of her family through her knowledge of connecting the past with the future.

Excerpt 64

> I want my kids to know that our culture is just as valid as mainstream or western culture. That we are different and we have our ways, and our language is just as valid and just as important even if we don't see it on TV every day or something. And I just want them to be proud of who THEY are. So my kids are my biggest influence and my grandkids that I'm going to have. So I guess it's just my family. You know I think about the future. My grandkids and then I think about past. My grandparents and my great grandparents. And I feel like I'm connected both to the future and the past by learning who I am.

For Rochelle, learning Gwich'in is not only about words and about structures, it is very clearly about who she is, where she came from (grandparents and great grandparents) and where she is going. She is making a clear analogy between Gwich'in language and Gwich'in culture. It is connected to emotions and a sense of well-being that she would like to pass on to her own children and grandchildren. When she says she wants her kids to be proud of who they are, this includes practicing Gwich'in culture and speaking the Gwich'in language. This positive attitude is the focus of the next section.

(2) *Positive attitude.* Rochelle's take on learning Gwich'in is one of being positive and of being proud of one's language and culture as exemplified in Excerpt 67. In Excerpt 65 she explains her reasons for using the Gwich'in word "gwinzįį" which means "good (in a general sense)" as part of the name of her business. This type of thinking puts her in a positive frame of mind, which as she explains, extends to all parts of her life, including her business. Not only is she using the Gwich'in language in a very public way in the name of her business, but also the word she chooses to use also comes in a positive meaning.

Excerpt 65

> I just kind of been using the name "Gwinzįį Studios" just because I feel like when you add "gwinzįį" like even when learning Gwich'in if you say "gwinzįį dee'in" or something. It just adds "make it good". It makes it positive and it makes what you're doing good. So that's why I use Gwinzįį Studios.

By using this positive outlook, especially concerning language learning, Rochelle is creating a new path to counter the actions of past counterproductive attitudes (as in Excerpt 65 above). Being positive and knowing the language well enough to "hold a basic conversation and understand" (Excerpt 63) provides a component of well-being that is a part of the healing process from the frustration of having not known her own language.

In the larger picture of her own language learning, Rochelle states in Excerpt 66 that her children are the major reason for her own language learning. Learning Gwich'in affords Rochelle an opportunity to understand who she is as a Gwich'in person, and central to this understanding is knowledge of her ancestors and their lands. She expresses this by referring to having "strong roots" which is directly tied to providing favorable prospects for her children to learn their ancestral language.

Excerpt 66

> I think probably my biggest influence is my kids for learning Gwich'in. I just want my kids to know who they are and to know exactly who they are and have strong roots and have the opportunity to learn their language… [I speak mostly with] Just my kids. Mainly [the youngest]. I don't know why but I speak Gwich'in to him more.

Rochelle's language learning provides a basis for a deep understanding of her own identity as a Gwich'in person which she can then pass on to her children. In Rochelle's opinion, she links her own learning of Gwich'in to her children's ability to "know who they are" (identity) and "have strong roots". In this sense, Rochelle indicates her practice of intergenerational transmission of the language, which has been fostered by her desire to learn the language, and taking action on this desire. As a Gwich'in person who did not benefit from intergenerational transmission as a child, as in Excerpt 66, this ability for Rochelle to create intergenerational transmission of the language is compounded into a keen sense of identity and

responsibility for language teaching and learning to occur. A holistic approach in which Rochelle begins with actions on learning the language well enough to understand it and use it with other Gwich'in community members in front of children and other young adults fosters this type of positive identity. An analogy can be a knot in a round circle where the knot is a barrier that occurred at a certain point in time in Rochelle's life. This barrier was the desire to learn Gwich'in but that there was no intergenerational transmission of the language for her or her peers at that time. As she progressed through life along this circle, opportunities began to open up for her in the form of the university Gwich'in class, which allowed her to learn and "hold a basic conversation and understand". She extends this knowledge out to generations after her, which provides a breakthrough of the knot that was there. Knowing that she has broken this knot in her own way provides a full circle where she had begun by retying the knot that was once severed.

(3) *Emerging proficiency.* Proficiency in a language, no matter what level, occurs because a person works at learning the language by being introduced to language that is new for that person. In Rochelle's case, as she states in Excerpt 67, she can understand a lot of the language, but still has a lot to learn.

Excerpt 67

I have lots to learn but I can understand

When Rochelle entered the university Gwich'in language class, she was at a novice-low level of proficiency, meaning that she knew some isolated words from her high school bilingual classes, but she was unable to create sentences or questions to communicate. After the university Gwich'in language class, her level of proficiency increased to a higher level that included the ability to create sentences and questions in order to communicate with other Gwich'in learners

and more proficient speaker. Other areas in which the university Gwich'in class contributed to her proficiency level was that she was able to take advantage of learning skills for speaking, reading, writing, and emergent grammar. The university class can only provide so many tools to contribute to her emerging proficiency, and she can continue to increase her proficiency level by continuing to learn the language. Besides learning her ancestral language, Rochelle has other thoughts about her identity that go beyond language learning or teaching.

(4) *Beyond language.* Even though this section is called *beyond language*, language learning or teaching are interconnected through the culture. Identity, as far as language learning or teaching, encompasses all of one's life and surroundings. To this end, Rochelle identifies other key components of her life that lend themselves to her identity and well-being. Some of these components in Rochelle's life include (1) family; (2) land; (3) traditional activities, and (4) values.

Family.

For Rochelle, family is very important because of a sense of connectedness to her past and future. The past include all of her ancestors who helped shape who she is, and her place in this world, while the future brings hope in the form of grandchildren she might eventually have. The connection that she feels grounds her identity as a mother, daughter, and aunt. Her children hold a place in her heart where she wants them to know about their culture, to be proud of who they are, and that the Gwich'in culture and language are just as valid as any other culture, such as the dominant culture as she points out in Excerpt 68 below.

Excerpt 68

> I want my kids to know that our culture is just as valid as mainstream or western culture. That we are different and we have our ways, and our language is just as valid and just as important even if we don't see it on TV every day or something. And I just want them [her children] to be proud of who THEY are.

> So my kids are my biggest influence and my grandkids that I'm going to have. So I guess it's just my family. You know I think about the future. My grandkids and then I think about the past. My grandparents and my great grandparents. And I feel like I'm connected both to the future and the past by learning who I am.

Another point that Rochelle makes is that when she was learning the Gwich'in language, it occurred to her that the language, culture and people are all interconnected. As she was learning the language, she came to the realization that one cannot learn the language without mentioning known family and community members, as she relates in Excerpt 69.

> Excerpt 69
>
> …learning the Gwich'in language is like we're talking about my family and we're talking about people that I know. Like even when we learn about common Gwich'in names or whatever it was, I remember hearing those names of some people and I like "oh yeah. He lives in Fort Yukon…

Land.

Rochelle and her father were proactive in their efforts to protect their ancestral lands from exploitation by a large corporation who wanted to drill for oil and gas. The protection of ancestral lands is necessary for them as a family because of the sustenance it provides for them throughout the year. The land provides foods, fuel, and clothing for them that would otherwise be difficult to obtain in the small village in which they live. Land and language are ultimately tied, and Rochelle points out that when she was teaching elementary children, that she included presentations to them on language and land, which generated discussions, as she states in Excerpt 70.

> Excerpt 70
>
> I would give a few presentations. Make it a little different for the younger kids and for the older, and show them my work and stuff, and my dvds. I would even show them the language dvd that I made and talk about that. It's important to

protect our land, and that land trade dvd that I made. I did videos online too about the land trade stuff.

Traditional Activities.

Once Rochelle was finished speaking about the land to the elementary students; it then provided a natural segway into discussing, as in Excerpt 71, traditional activities associated with hunting, fishing, picking berries, or gathering and preparing wood for fuel.

Traditional activities provides Indigenous people with a sense of pride and accomplishment, which contributes to one's identity. Foremost amongst traditional activities is in the preparation of traditional foods from the land. Rochelle recalls how she grew up in this rich environment and how this type of knowledge is intertwined with the language.

Excerpt 71

Those [activities] are things I grew up doing, like plucking ducks or whatever. It just seems like Gwich'in [language] ties everything together.

Values.

Rochelle holds deep respect for the Gwich'in culture, and embedded within the culture is the underlying current of language. One of the reasons that Rochelle wanted to gain a higher level of proficiency in Gwich'in was because she had a deep desire to learn the language, as she states in Excerpt 72.

Excerpt 72

You know, I feel like I didn't have much [Gwich'in language proficiency] to begin with, but what I did have was I wanted to [learn the language]. I wanted to learn and I have deep respect for the culture.

Elders are much respected in the Gwich'in culture, as they possess life experiences and knowledge from which younger generations can learn. During the time that Rochelle was an

itinerant art teacher for the Yukon Flats School District, she had ample time to visit with elders and have positive experiences in the various communities as she states in Excerpt 73.

Excerpt 73

> When I was the itinerant artist for the Yukon Flats, I used that opportunity every time I went to all the villages and traveled. I always spoke [Gwich'in]. I asked people to speak to me and I told them I was learning and stuff, and so I got practice. And people always said, "Oh! You should say it like this." Or they teach me new things or "This is how you say that." I would go out and visit elders and meet people in the community. I just had really good experiences like with our culture.

Children represent the future of cultures, but sometimes they need to be made aware of their own language and culture, and that it holds a special place on their earth. One of the art projects that Rochelle has the students do is to create a small picture that shows the Gwich'in in a global perspective. As she points out in Excerpt 74, she made the children aware that there is no other place on earth where Gwich'in people have homelands on which they can use the land for sustenance.

Excerpt 74

> I just wanted to open their perspective on our Gwich'in communities and a global sense. One of the projects that we did was we would draw a little picture but we would think about what makes our village special in the whole world. Because there's not places like this [Gwich'in villages]. There's nowhere really like this in the world where we can go hunting and get our own food and stuff.

In sum, subjectivity for Rochelle involves the desire to learn Gwich'in but not being afforded the opportunity from her own family, school or community. Her family lacked the intergenerational transmission of the language and bilingual classes in the school focused on bicultural, rather than the Gwich'in language. In addition, once Rochelle began to learn the language, she found that there were no opportunities to practice speaking in the various communities in which there were very proficient speakers. In addition, she found that there was a

lot of negativity in attitudes that was a deterrent. Table 4.1 reveals Rochelle's positive components, along with adverse situations that she has encountered for language learning:

Table 4.1. Rochelle's Affordances and Challenging Situations

Affordances	Challenges
desire to learn language since childhood, and took action	community knows importance of younger generations learning their ancestral language but sends mixed signals for support
bicultural classes in k-12	bilingual classes in k-12 school focus on single vocabulary but not on proficiency
university classes allowed her skills to read, write, know some grammar, teach, learn, and research Gwich'in	lack of curriculum with specific topics
attained enough proficiency so that she comprehends more than she can speak, and has ability to create sentences and ask questions to communicate	no opportunities to practice speaking because of lack of speakers
awareness of other language learners	immediate family are not Gwich'in language speakers
defense against negativity	negative attitudes, such as laughter, impact language learners
visits elders to practice using language	need for more young people to learn with new ideas and support
instills pride and language use in school aged children – focus on future generations	need for safe place to study language with proficient, supportive speaker along with other learners
strong identity as a Gwich'in woman – respects culture, children, family, ancestors, language, land, traditional activities, and values	
positive attitude towards language, culture, self, well-being, and business	
teaching her children the language	

Table 4.1 above reveals the positive situations in which Rochelle presents herself in real life activities that contribute to her desire to learn her ancestral language. Despite the barriers that

she faces in the wider context of the Gwich'in Nation, she wants to invoke change. These changes are in the form of learning her ancestral language, in which she encompasses various generations of the Gwich'in community, such as school-aged children, her own children, other Gwich'in language learners, and the elders. This change has transformed her into becoming proficient enough in the language to understand and be able to converse with other learners and speakers. This act of *doing* something meaningful forges a strong identity as a Gwich'in woman within the realm of the Gwich'in Nation.

Rochelle has worked extremely hard as a language learner and as part of herself as leading activity, Rochelle is a good example and excellent role model for other language learners, especially her young children and her other friends who state that they always wanted to learn Gwich'in. The ways in which Rochelle is such a good example and role model for language learning are that she has proven for not only herself but also other Gwich'in people that learning Gwich'in is an attainable goal. This is a good portrayal for what can be accomplished in such a short time at the university level, and conveys through her actions that in itself is a reflection of her desire to learn the language.

Main Participant—40-year-old Charleen

Charleen's hometown is Beaver, Alaska where she currently resides, but she has lived in the Gwich'in villages of Venetie, Circle, Fort Yukon and Chalkyitsik, and also Alaska's second largest city, Fairbanks. The reasons vary for why she lived in all of these different places, such as the career path of her parents, her mother's work as a K-12 teacher or her mother's pursuit of higher education. Charleen went to K-12 school in all of these Gwich'in places, including Fairbanks, as she was growing up.

Later on, Charleen also lived and worked in some of these places, such as Fort Yukon and Chalkyitsik. Charleen received her B.A. in Political Science and Government in 1991, and then obtained her M.Ed. with an emphasis on Language and Literacy in 2004 from the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF). At the time of this research, she worked on a Ph.D. from UAF, in which she plans to analyze the stories of Gwich'in women's roles and how they affect Gwich'in communities.

Charleen has four school-aged children who are being raised mostly in Beaver, but during the summer months, the family travels to Chalkyitsik by boat to be with other family members. Just as Rochelle "live(s) off the land", so too does Charleen and her family—that is subsisting on what the land has to offer in the way of seasonal foods. When Charleen is not working full-time at the Cruikshank School in Beaver, she teaches summer school for the Yukon Flats School District, and moves to that particular Gwich'in area where the summer school is being held with her children.

While Charleen works on her Ph.D., she works full time for the Yukon Flats School District as the principal-teacher at the small K-12 Cruikshank School in Beaver. In this K-12 school, she is responsible for literally everything about the school, where she has the role of being an administrator, a teacher, a staff supervisor, and provides maintenance of the school. Four of the approximately twenty students in the school are her children. She is extremely dedicated to her students and works very hard so that her school attains the State of Alaska's adequate yearly progress (AYP), which they have achieved on a regular basis. "Those kids have to make percentage increase every year. They have to be on task." All of the staff who works in the school is Gwich'in. "We have 100% Native staff."

Beaver is a multicultural, multiethnic community where Gwich'in, Koyukon, Iñupiaq, and Japanese descendants are represented. The first language of the community is English, but one family also speaks Gwich'in. Charleen states, "We have a multicultural multiethnic community but really a monolingual with the exception of [a person's] family. They speak to one another [in Gwich'in]." Except on a very limited basis, such as in the church, not all of the other Indigenous languages are spoken in the community. One of the staff members in the school is a very proficient speaker of Gwich'in, and as a result, Gwich'in is taught to all of the students—both in person and by videoconferencing. "Every single student in this school is required to take a Gwich'in class. We're teaching Gwich'in to everybody—Koyukon, Iñupiaq, non-Native, everybody." In addition, Japanese is also taught through videoconferencing. The main reason for learning Japanese is that the school has a yearly exchange program with the Ainu, an Indigenous group, of Japan.

The data for Charleen's profile was collected on June 1, 2010 and November 13, 2010. The interview on June 1, 2010 lasted approximately 2.5 hours resulting in 50 pages of coded transcripts, while the interview on November 13, 2010 lasted approximately 45 minutes with 20 pages of coded transcripts. The analysis revealed the following themes: (A) Learning Gwich'in: (1) novice-low level vocabulary; (2) lack of time; (3) multiple languages; (4) educational system, and (5) formulaic phrases; and (B) Supporting language learners: (1) role as principal-teacher; (2) funding, and (3) church activities. Figure 4.3 provides an overview of Charleen's themes for supporting language learners.

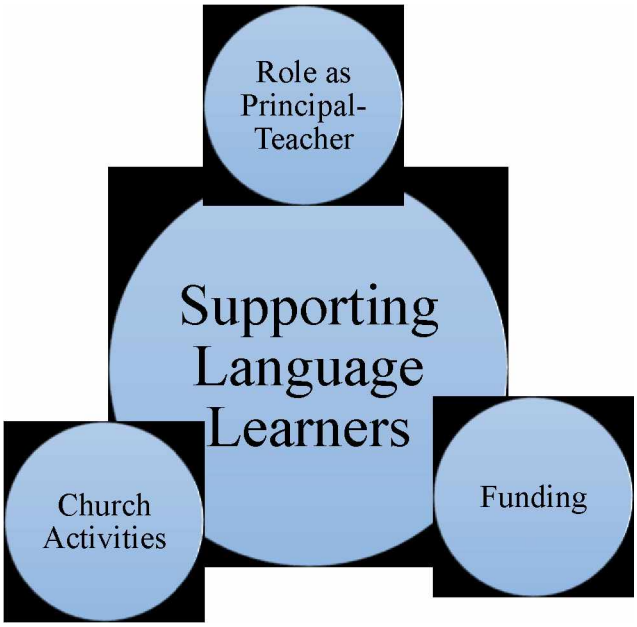

Figure 4.3. Supporting Language Learners for 40-year-old Charleen.

Learning Gwich'in. Novice-low level Vocabulary.

Charleen is aware of her novice-low level of Gwich'in vocabulary, which she realizes, hinders her ability to converse in the language. This hindrance could be situated in how bilingual classes were taught and reverts to the lack of Native language teacher training.

Having a novice-low proficiency for vocabulary is problematic for Charleen because she is unable to respond appropriately or partake in Gwich'in discourse. It is problematic because she is at the mercy of other more proficient speakers that she encounters which seems to be in direct contrast to her exposure to the language as a child as she reminisces in Excerpt 75.

Excerpt 75

> I remember hearing Gwich'in all the time. I remember because my grandmother lived with my mother and my family a lot.

When Charleen was asked if she was a latent speaker as in Excerpt 76, meaning one who can understand but not speak, she felt that she was not sure if she could be considered a latent speaker because of her novice-low level of vocabulary.

Excerpt 76

I don't really know if I am a latent speaker because my vocabulary is limited.

Nonetheless, Charleen does use her novice-low level of Gwich'in vocabulary by way of commands, thereby stating her identity as a Gwich'in woman. She uses her novice-low level of Gwich'in vocabulary to introduce herself, and to name items that she knows or to describe a feeling. In addition to novice-low level of vocabulary, most of this vocabulary is contained to formulaic phrases and do not move beyond them.

In Charleen's experiences of using the language, she noticed that a good number of language learners use only formulaic phrases such as the weather or to inquire about how a person is doing. She indicates in Excerpt 77 that she is unable to say more complex sentences that she would like to be able to convey but is unable to put these sentences together in a cohesive fashion.

Excerpt 77

> I'm not really sure about combining words and phrases that are not formulaic like weather. I mean those are all the same. It's not like "downriver was clear but here, it's smoky". You know, I don't know how to put that together. I have no idea.

By only knowing "formulaic" phrases, Charleen feels limited in her speaking ability because she is unable to ask or answer spontaneous questions. Being unable to speak beyond formulaic phrases can be frustrating for a person such as Charleen because she longs to contribute to conversation that is taking place around her in a meaningful way. Without being able to contribute to Gwich'in discourse, this can have an adverse effect on Charleen as a language

learner and speaker because it is a disheartening feeling to one's identity if one cannot participate fully in the Gwich'in culture where humor plays a large role in discourse. Time plays a major role in language learning because language learning requires an enormous amount of time so that practice in using the language takes place, which eventually leads to language acquisition. This leads us into Charleen's next subtheme on time limitations.

Lack of time.

In the small village of Beaver, Charleen has many roles that keep her extraordinarily busy, such as being the principal-teacher at the K-12 school, which revolves around the academic well-being of her students, which is her main priority as expressed in Excerpt 78. Added to this priority is the fact that she has to make arrangements for the physical maintenance of the school. The school is only one facet of her busy life in which she spends an enormous amount of her day. With four growing children, her home life, after approximately 12 hours at the school commences before it is time to retire for the night. During the weekends, Charleen spends quality time with her children as they go for family recreational activities in the surrounding area of Beaver. Charleen is also involved with the Episcopal Church in the community, and brings her children to church services, some of which are delivered in the Gwich'in language. At other times, services are conducted in both the Gwich'in and Iñupiaq languages. After a very long day, Charleen somehow finds the time to be mindful of her academic obligations. All of Charleen's day-to-day work, family, community, and academic obligations prevent her from her own language learning because it effects how much time she can spend on her own language learning, for which there is none.

Excerpt 78

> Right now I feel like my priorities are my students and my children and their language learning. I think [name] and I both spend a lot of time just concentrating on them and not ourselves really. But my obligation to my students is STRONG. Yes. I have to. Those kids have to make percentage increase every year. They have to be on task.
> I invest a lot of my time in my students in providing a good learning environment for them to learn Gwich'in.

Charleen's experiences throughout the day carry many responsibilities, which require all of her time from morning to night to concentrate on how well students do in the school as she points out in Excerpt 79, and simply has no time to learn her language. She makes time available during the school day and encourages a teacher to teach Gwich'in, but she does not teach Gwich'in to the students herself. In the era of No Child Left Behind (NCLB)[3], making this time is not always easy.

Excerpt 79

> In order to make this school run, it just takes all my time and effort. And then to take a class in the evening, there's no time for me to just STUDY. I would love to have by myself time to study [Gwich'in] but I just don't.
> I can't go in there [Gwich'in K-12 language classes] and indulge myself to learn new phrases. I need to work with those students.

For language learning, obligatory responsibilities make it impossible for language learning for Charleen because she indicates in Excerpt 79 that dedicating her time to language learning requires time that she does not have. This is a frustrating situation because although she is interested in learning the language, it is not a viable option because she says that there is a need for her to work with the students in the school. Despite this lack of time for her own language

[3] The NCLB was a law that was passed by Congress in 2002 to increase the role of the federal government to hold K-12 schools accountable for student outcomes, especially underprivileged students. All of the school subjects placed an emphasis on the use of the English language, and therefore there was limited time, if any, to teach Indigenous languages. This lack of time to teach Indigenous languages contributes to continued decline and status of Indigenous language revitalization efforts (Klein, 2015).

learning, Charleen personifies a Gwich'in identity that is reflected onto and through the children which provides her with a sense of accomplishment to be able to spend all of her energy on the children in the school.

Besides the lack of time for Charleen to dedicate herself to learning Gwich'in, there is also the added factor of the effects of historically having had multiple languages in the community where she was raised.

Multiple languages.

Charleen states in Excerpt 80 that she lives in a multicultural and multi-ethnic community where there are descendants of Indigenous Alaskan groups, such as the Gwich'in and Koyukon Athabascans and Iñupiaq Eskimo. Unfortunately, Charleen expresses the fact that the community is monolingual in the English language, however, there is one family of Gwich'in who actively uses their language among themselves but most of them do not use it with others in the community.

Excerpt 80

> We have a multicultural multi-ethnic community but really a monolingual with the exception of [one] family.

The community's connection to Gwich'in is weak and therefore the foundation for Charleen is not strong. With this many languages, Charleen said that when she was growing up, it was difficult to know which language was being used because of the mixture of languages that have merged between Indian (Gwich'in and Koyukon) and Eskimo (Iñupiaq) languages. For Charleen as a language learner, the background of so many languages have created a situation because of the confusion about the language to which certain vocabulary belonged and whether words were being used correctly. She states that she was under the impression that certain words were Gwich'in, when in fact; they could have been one of the other languages of the community.

Excerpt 81

> There's a lot of words that are like common place here in Beaver that are a mixture of things like puguq is apparently a very strong word for like "Don't fool around." there are also other words like chulu'. It's like somebody who's poor and different emotional words that I always thought were Gwich'in.

Charleen points out in Excerpt 81 that it is difficult to confirm whether the vocabulary for which she is confused is Koyukon, Iñupiaq or Gwich'in because there are currently no speakers of Koyukon or Iñupiaq in Beaver on whom she can rely. It is a confusing situation for speaking because she might use words from other languages when trying to speak Gwich'in. She lacks confidence in using the linguistic resources of the local language environment. With all of these Native languages being small and not cohesive, they are disappearing because the community is monolingual, as she points out in Excerpt 82.

Excerpt 82

> There were Iñupiaq people who knew their language in this community. None of their descendants I don't think know very much of it. There's no Koyukon speakers now. So you can't really ask anybody.

Charleen grew up in a multilingual, multi-ethnic community, and respects the other languages that were once spoken in the community. Despite having grown up in a multilingual, multi-ethnic community, Charleen maintains a strong identity of being Gwich'in because of her mother's encouragement for her to learn the language. While the community has its own challenges with having had multiple languages, the educational system poses other challenges.

Educational system.

The educational system in the villages has taken its toll on the intergenerational transmission of Alaska's Native languages, which began with mandatory boarding schools. In Excerpt 83 Charleen states that her mother went to boarding school, and when she returned, was able to understand what was being said to her in Gwich'in but always answered back in English.

Excerpt 83

> My mom understood. She had a high vocabulary plus she understood when people were talking to her. She was always talking to grandma but she would always answer back in English but she was of the boarding school generation.

Charleen's mother was bilingual with one language developing more fully because of school, which affected her children. Charleen's generation is monolingual in English, with Gwich'in not developing, and unless learning Gwich'in becomes part of Charleen's self as leading activity, the Gwich'in will have stopped with her grandmother.

For Charleen then, this lack of intergenerational transmission of the language was a link that never occurred, and then hearing her mother answer back in English more than likely affected her own language learning ideas about how a language is learned.

In Excerpt 84 Charleen wondered how intergenerational transmission of the language did not occur from her grandmother's generation to her own generation. Charleen states that her grandmother was trilingual, in that she spoke Koyukon, Gwich'in and English on in equal basis. Then she relates that her mother understood Gwich'in but only spoke English, and that she is monolingual in English. She believes the schools played a large part in this shift to monolinguals.

Excerpt 84

> She [grandmother] was trilingual. She spoke Gwich'in, Koyukon and English. How do we go from one generation of being trilingual through one generation… my mom understood…but she would always answer back in English and then now I'm monolingual. As far as I can tell [the] educational system plays a huge part.

The shift from use of multiple languages to primary dependence on English has created the uncertain Gwich'in learning environment in which Charleen now finds herself. Education is a social and legal requirement and contradictory because education is a necessary tool as a means to obtain meaningful work so that one can be a contributing member of society. She works in the

school system, which has supported language shift, and must have an adverse effect on her identity.

In addition to Charleen's mother being a latent speaker, Charleen believes that something, such as an "attitude" to the language or speaking "ability", stopped her mother from conversing with her children in the language, Excerpt 85. On the same token, Charleen said that her mother made sure the language was a part of the school curriculum through what Charleen describes as Indian Education Week, which was spearheaded by her mother in whatever Gwich'in village she was teaching. Charleen said that the focus of Indian Education Week was on Gwich'in culture.

Excerpt 85

> Something stopped her from speaking you know. I don't know if it was an attitude or if it was ability.
> Anyway she was always motivated to work in language revitalization. I remember a lot of the programs SHE started like Indian Ed Weeks were started by HER. That was part of her ideas and I remember them being in Chalkyitsik, Venetie, and Circle. Everywhere she went she tried to have like a cultural week. She was always interested in Native language. I just always remember language being very important. I don't remember one single incident or anybody telling me directly, but we were just always learning our language. Incorporating our language and culture.

The ideal time to learn a language is as a child, and Charleen found herself in a situation where although her mother was a strong advocate for the Gwich'in language her actions focused on the transmission of Gwich'in culture. The transmission of Gwich'in culture is an important part of the Gwich'in language, but how much of the time was devoted to using the language with the culture is unclear, especially for only one week out of the academic school year. At the time when the culture weeks occurred, it contributed to the formation of her identity as a Gwich'in where she learned how to sew and make traditional clothing. Charleen learned to value cultural activities over language per se.

Charleen says, "we were always learning our language", but when having the culture week set up, the mentality should be to emphasize that learning the language might be the goal and then do what has to be done, but in reality people do not. People conflate language and culture, but language is not the focus.

In addition to the educational system getting in the way of language learning, Charleen points out in Excerpt 86 that the school district does not support a bilingual program through a budget; nor do they have Gwich'in language teachers or Native speakers.

Excerpt 86

> The school district does not have a current bilingual program so they don't have a separate budget [for] bilingual teachers or Gwich'in teachers or any Native speaker.

Gwich'in is a highly endangered language because of the decline in the numbers of speakers, and the fact that the language is not being learned by younger generations. As each year goes by, there are fewer and fewer speakers left, and for this reason, it is imperative that the school district provide financial support for language instruction to occur in the schools. Oftentimes, the school may be the only place where students are exposed to their ancestral language, but because of a lack of financial support for language instruction, it sends the message that language learning is not a priority. Since language learning is not a priority, it may contribute to negative attitudes that students have regarding their language. In this sense, the school is a non-contributor to the very identities of the Gwich'in students and the people they serve. For her part, Charleen made sure to hire a highly proficient Gwich'in speaker who has his own classroom, complete with props that she supplies.

In sum, Charleen has two hurdles that hinder her active acquisition of the language. Chief among them is the lack of time that she can commit because of her deep sense of obligation to

her students in the school. She places them first beyond her own language learning, and therefore is unable to go beyond the formulaic phrases and novice-low level vocabulary with which she is familiar. In addition, the role of the school has been a detriment because of their past treatment of Native languages, and also their present actions or non-actions in supporting the teaching of Native languages in the K-12 school.

The following section will show what Charleen does as she interacts with others, which are: (1) creating a positive school environment; (2) securing funding for bilingual program; and (3) promoting Gwich'in outside of school (in church).

(1) *Creating positive school environment.* Charleen is certified as an Alaskan professional teacher and she has a M.Ed. that has strengthened her abilities as a principal-teacher in her small community and her employer, the Yukon Flats School District. As Charleen states in Excerpt 87, her position as the principal-teacher allows her to wield a lot of power by how she maneuvers the western school system for the betterment of her students.

Excerpt 87

> It's within my ability to have this position [Principal-Teacher] and obtain those certificates and all the diplomas so that I can have this position in which I can turn around and use the western system that did SO much harm to try to do some good for future generations.

Charleen is aware of the history of schooling for Alaska Native students and clearly articulates a desire "to turn around" to do some good. However, she is constrained by larger sociopolitical and educational factors such as No Child Left Behind.

The way in which Charleen applies herself to make it possible to be a principal-teacher is by using the wider school educational system to obtain higher degrees so that she is able to think critically and analyze the situation she encounters in her job as the principal-teacher. Since Charleen envisions providing challenging academics for her students, she also makes sure that

other Gwich'in faculty, as in Excerpt 88, teaches these students. There are three teachers in the Beaver school—Charleen, another teacher, and an aide—who are all Native.

Excerpt 88

> It's because of the staff. We have 100% Native staff. And so everybody has their own strengths.

Another undertaking that Charleen employs is to make full use of the aide who is a highly proficient speaker of Gwich'in. She does this by making sure that the aide teaches Gwich'in to the children instead of what the aide would be doing if he were in other YFSD schools, which would be to assist other students in a certified teacher's classroom. Charleen makes it possible for him to shape language education for the community. Using her aide in a way she avoids the "tremendous waste of resources" that it would be to use a highly proficient speaker as an aide in a certified teacher's classroom. Normally, a teacher's aide in a certified teacher's classroom assists the teacher with a variety of tasks and students. They may assist students by helping them individually. Certified teachers teach academic subjects in English, and Charleen thinks that using a highly proficient speaker of Gwich'in in these classrooms is not a good use of a knowledgeable Gwich'in language resource.

Charleen realizes in Excerpt 89 that if she were not available to be the principal-teacher in the Beaver school; the way the school is administered under her guidance would not be possible without her presence. In particular, she ensures that the teaching of Gwich'in is the main focal point in the school through the hire of the highly proficient aide.

Excerpt 89

> But that's because I'm here, and if it [I] wasn't then [name] would be doing aide duties. [S/He] would be sitting in a teacher's classroom assisting other students, which I think is a tremendous waste of resources.

(2) *Securing funding for bilingual program.* Charleen, as an administrator, supports the bilingual program at the Cruikshank School by making purchases, as in Excerpt 90, that support activities for language lessons for the other two Native faculty. Charleen secures funding to support a bilingual program at the Beaver school, despite the fact that the YFSD "does not have a current bilingual program". She manipulates her own budget in order to keep the bilingual program in her school.

Excerpt 90

> Another part of my administrative duties is to supplement [the bilingual] program. We use our regular instructional monies, supply monies to purchase things for the bilingual program so we have these English as a second language catalogs that you can buy stuff for, and they have little sets where they have little people or little objects and it's all in drawers.

In Excerpt 91 Charleen makes sure that in the Beaver school all of the students are exposed to at least one-half day of Gwich'in language and culture. She does this through a schedule that allows different students to be with the Gwich'in language teacher at different times. Even when the students take their "academic subjects" with Charleen, they are exposed to Gwich'in commands.

Excerpt 91

> So [Gwich'in Aide] does that [teach Gwich'in] all morning and then in the afternoon we have some younger students with [him/her] and in the afternoon we're teaching academic subjects. But they're also being exposed to Gwich'in commands. Different kinds of things.

Charleen has to keep on top of funding opportunities for her school. In the following Excerpt 92, she relates that she applied for monies for technology, which made it possible for each child to have a laptop. Therefore, besides the everyday operations of the school, she has to be aware of funding opportunities that support school goals. Part of receiving this technology grant was to receive training from Apple, which the faculty and students received two times in

one academic school year. Charleen made sure that this training on technology involved Gwich'in language learning which in turn provides students an opportunity for presenting in Gwich'in as she states, "the kids made podcast". To verify that the podcast was in Gwich'in, Charleen produced a copy for me to view.

Excerpt 92

> Another part of my administrative duties I have to lobby for these things that are available to us. So we have the State of Alaska did something that some districts were on this grant or something. And those schools that put in for this had monies given to them from the State for digital schools. We've had two apple trainings this year.
> The kids made podcast. We learned how to do all these kinds of things and [name] made one that was about the weather.

Charleen makes sure that her students share with community members events that occur in the school. For instance, each student and their family receive a school made copy of an annual yearbook. All throughout this yearbook, Charleen encourages each student to write a small paragraph about himself or herself in the Gwich'in language. As she states in Excerpt 93, Gwich'in is used in every single project that is associated with the school. This means that the school makes optimal use of their valuable resource, the highly proficient speaker.

Excerpt 93

> In the yearbook we have lots of [Gwich'in and English] language, and we try to include that in all of our projects. Make the kids include it.

Charleen states in Excerpt 94 that she wants to ensure that the school is a safe learning environment for the students. Not only on learning Gwich'in and cultural values, but those other cultures as well, such as Koyukon, which is a neighboring Athabascan language. Koyukon used to be spoken in the village, but now it is no longer heard.

Excerpt 94

> In providing a good learning environment for them [students] to learn Gwich'in but not only that, but other things in our culture [like] sewing, playing music, playing fiddle music. We teach them the dances. We teach them Koyukon dances.

By providing these learning opportunities for diverse cultures, it sends a message to the students to respect all cultures no matter how different they may be from their own backgrounds.

Through the school, Charleen teaches the students so that they know how to behave around elders, especially if there is a planned visit by elders to the school. The way the elders teach differs greatly from the way the students are taught in the western system, and Charleen points this out to them in Excerpt 95.

Excerpt 95

> I tell those kids. "Watch your elders and what they're doing." Of course, before the elders are here, I have to instruct them. I said, "They're not going to stand at the front of the room and touch the smart board and tell you this is what you're going to do now, and this is what you're going to do next and draw a little thing up there for you.

In traditional Indigenous cultures such as Gwich'in, children are raised to observe and listen, and later on at an appropriate age, they are expected to replicate what they had observed under the watchful eye of the person whom they were observing. This way of learning is in stark contrast to the western way of learning in which there is a lot of abstract talking before there is a tangible product. Charleen points out what she says to the students to prepare them for elders who visit the school.

However, before these elders come to the school to teach traditional skills such as sewing, Charleen enlists the skills of the highly proficient speaker faculty member as in Excerpt 96 to teach the students vocabulary that will be used during the elders' visit to the school.

Excerpt 96

> [Name] was here. S/he [aide] had a big list on the board about "kwaiitryah [traditional skin boots]", and then all the parts and "khaiindoo [thread]" and using them in sentences and the kids are hearing it. That was another really good opportunity for them to hear [the highly proficient speakers] talk. They [elder and aide] spoke together and [name] prayed for them and s/he talked to them about different values and things like that.

Sewing is an important tradition that Charleen passes on to all of the students. Some of these hand sewn traditional items of clothing are used for dancing, conferences or for sharing with other cultures what are traditional regalia for Gwich'in people. Once the elders arrive from other Gwich'in villages to teach the students how to sew items such as beaded dancing boots, the students are exposed to how elders do things. Charleen relates that the elders and aide always begin with a prayer for the students, faculty and others, and they talk to the students about positive cultural values. Having the elders and the aide together also allows a rare opportunity for the students to hear Gwich'in being spoken between highly proficient speakers.

In order to make sure that the school runs smoothly, Charleen has to take advantage of available funds, which she can utilize throughout the school year.

Charleen states in Excerpt 97 that she is "always thinking about funding sources" for which to apply from the school system to supplement projects in the Beaver school, especially funding that will enhance the bilingual program in the school.

Excerpt 97

> I'm always thinking about the funding sources that are available through the school system. Coming back to that idea that this system of education about killed our language; we're going to use every single (?) we can to bring it [language] back.

By obtaining these funds, Charleen displays a bit of resistance to past educational practices by using the funds to teach the language to her students, and keeping the highly proficient speaker on as faculty.

In the community, Charleen ensures that her children are aware of the Gwich'in liturgical language of the church. Since the introduction of Christianity, the church plays an important role in the identity of Gwich'in people. Gwich'in is one of the few Indigenous languages in Alaska where the entire King James Bible has been translated into the language. During a Gwich'in service, all of the prayers and songs are conducted in the language, so even though the liturgical language is challenging linguistically, many Gwich'in people are exposed to the language.

(3) *Promoting Gwich'in outside of school (in church).* Outside of Charleen's intense involvement with the school, she is involved in the community so that her children are able to participate in and be exposed to the Gwich'in that is used in St. Matthew's Episcopal Church in the community. When services are held, Charleen conveys that Gwich'in prayers and songs are incorporated. Ever since the Gwich'in have been introduced to Christianity and to the reading and writing of prayers and songs in the church, it has been passed on to generations who still practice these prayers and hymns to this day. So although Charleen laments in Excerpt 76 that she has a "limited vocabulary", she has found a niche in the church where Gwich'in is actively being used, and in which she participates and is also passing this tradition on to her children.

Charleen points out in Excerpt 98 that sometimes other members of the community will use their language in the church, such as Iñupiaq in this instance, to sing or say a prayer. It is at times like these that Charleen appreciates hearing the other languages used in the church.

Excerpt 98

> In the church we sing the ch'ilik [songs] and we say the Lord's Prayer and sing the doxology and other ritualized things. I mean we try to incorporate the Gwich'in into the service. [Name] was there and we sang Sweet By and By in Gwich'in and English, and she sang it in Iñupiaq, which is really neat because I haven't heard Iñupiaq in this town in a l-o-n-g time.

In the above instance, three languages were being used during church services. Charleen expresses a deep respect and pleasure at being able to hear the current languages represented in Beaver. Gwich'in is the main language used for church services because a Gwich'in speaker conducts the services. This gives Charleen a chance to hear and use the liturgical language, which provides her with a sense of well-being. This sense of well-being is part of her foundation on which her identity sits.

In sum, Charleen devoted herself to the students in her school. She is an advocate in all facets of her school as the principal-teacher and she makes every effort to infuse the Gwich'in language in all the school projects. By spending so much time on her students, it is difficult for her to focus on her own language learning, but what Charleen does as an advocate for the students, is a much needed support mechanism for their language learning. She sets a good example for the students by her hard work ethics and caring attitude for all cultures that have been part of the Beaver community.

Table 4.2 illustrates Charleen's affordances and challenges she has encountered for efforts at language learning:

Table 4.2. Charleen's Affordances and Challenging Situations

Affordances	Challenges
Knowledge of formulaic phrases and Gwich'in cultural activities	Multiple responsibilities: work, family, community, academics
Supports and infuses Gwich'in language learning in all K-12 classes	Not enough time in the day
Shares children's language learning with community	No support from school district
Supports bilingual teacher	Lack of intergenerational transmission of language
Principal-teacher role	Multiple language families
Seeks outside funding for language learning	
Provides safe environment for language learning	
Teaches respect for elders and various cultures	

Charleen's affordances in Table 4.2 above show the types of real life activities that she has for herself, such as knowing formulaic phrases that she uses on a daily basis. Other than actively learning the language, Charleen devotes a generous amount of her time to support faculty who provide a safe language-learning environment for the K-12 students. This ultimate sacrifice of her time has resulted in her own lack of learning Gwich'in, but has resulted in vicariously instilling language and culture in the very students for whom she cares. Knowledge of cultural activities is a form of identity that Charleen has forged which serves as a form of cultural capital (Ahlers, 2006).

Charleen is energetic in her pursuit of creating opportunities for Gwich'in language teaching and learning, and is an excellent role model in the school and community of Beaver. Long, hard and dedicated work is apparent in her work ethics that proposes change for language learning and teaching.

Summary

This chapter presented participants' statements regarding speaking and learning Gwich'in. Data were analyzed for the two main participants and nine background participants ranging in age from 20 to 80 years old. A profile has been provided for each one of the participants in order to provide a short history of each person. The profiles of the nine background participants provide a backdrop for the two main participants. This section briefly summarized the main points raised by the participants in relation to language learning identity.

The two main participants, Rochelle and Charleen, have forged very different Gwich'in language learning identities for themselves, which more than likely will change over time. Rochelle expressed a desire to learn Gwich'in but went through many obstacles to get to the point where she is now in her language learning. As she was growing up, she was not afforded the opportunity to learn the language either at home or in the community. It was not until she attended the university that her dream was realized, and thereby her connection to the culture and identity. In this same vein, at least three of the background participants who ranged in age from 30 to 50, indicated that they would like to learn or continue learning the language but also face challenges that make it difficult for them to be Gwich'in language learners. Some challenges for Rochelle and some of the background participants are: (1) lack of opportunities for practice in speaking; (2) lack of language use by more proficient speakers; (3) that the generation before them, i.e. parents, do not know the language; (4) that bilingual classes need to focus on speaking, rather than culture; and (5) the need for a supportive and positive atmosphere for learning.

Charleen's Gwich'in language learning identity is very different from Rochelle's. She wears multiple hats in the village of Beaver, including principal-teacher; full-time mother of four children, ages 7-16; Ph.D. student, and student in evening classes. In the school, besides being

the principal-teacher, she is also an administrator, seeks funding, and makes sure that the Gwich'in language is part of the curriculum for all of the students who attend. As far as language learning, while these are important components of her life and the community, and are time-consuming which gives her no time to learn the language. The novice-level of Gwich'in vocabulary that she does know are formulaic phrases. Nonetheless, Charleen lives a Gwich'in lifestyle, which allows her to live on the land and subsists on the game, fish, and berries the land provides. She is adept at sewing fur clothing, beading, and doing cultural activities such as mushing dogs. Being able to partake in all of these types of identities is a large part of Charleen's life and shapes who she is as a Gwich'in person.

Overall, all of the participants, including the main participants, employ a variety of positive strategies that support Gwich'in language learning. These are summarized in Table 4.3 and the bolded strategies are discussed below.

Table 4.3. Strategies that Support Gwich'in Language Learning

	20-30 F	20-30 M	30-40 F	30-40 M	40-50 F	40-50 M	50-60 F	50-60 M	70-80 F	70-80 M	80-90 M
(1) Practicing	x	x	x		x	x	x		x		x
(2) Taking University Gwich'in language class (adults)	x	x	x	x	x	x (gram -mar)	x				
Listening for comprehension								x			
Using Gwich'in notes as resource	x										
(3) Supporting language learners	x		x		x	x	x				
Supporting bilingual program					x						

Infusing language into curriculum			x		x	x	x				
(4) Having a Positive outlook			x			x					
Learning identity and sharing			x			x	x				
(5) Including media, technology, theatre or yearbook use			x	x	x	x	x				
Allowing children to move between city and homeland									x		
Networking			x	x		x	x			x	
(6) Connecting to past			x			x	x				
(7) Respecting language			x		x	x					
Creating Gwich'in children's book			x				x				
Being positive in bilingual class			x								
(8) Committing to language learning			x			x	x				
Ignoring obstacles			x			x	x				
Countering negative attitudes by dominant language towards Native languages						x					
Being a role model for children			x			x	x			x	x

Sacrificing own language learning for children					x						
Providing safe learning environment			x		x		x				
Involving children in community					x						
Ensuring children know cultural phrases					x						
Seeking funding opportunities					x						

There are two areas related to learning Gwich'in which are important, as mentioned by six different participants. These are: (1) practicing to speak, and (2) taking university classes, including grammar.

Practicing to speak.

Six of the language learners—two main participants (30 year old Rochelle and 40 year old Charleen) and five background participants (20 year old Maggie and Raavit, 40 year old Allan, myself at 50, 70 year old Soozan, and 80 year old Simon)—put practice in speaking the language as a necessary part of learning the language. All of these language learners, with the exception of Soozan and Simon, are at various levels of proficiency, and make it a point to practice with known speakers, highly proficient speakers, and those who are in the process of learning. This goes to show that language learners rely on the social environment in which they live and their actions in order to practice speaking. Uncertainty plays a role for them, in that if these language learners are not helped by those who know how to speak, they will remain at their current proficiency levels, and will not be able to become better speakers if there are no opportunities to practice what they had learned. Without practice to use the language in real

contexts and situations within the community, it is difficult to continue the process of learning the language. In addition, if these language learners who have the desire to practice but are not fueled by others, this desire may wane and all their efforts will be for nothing. I will use the analogy of how children learn in relation to language with ancestral language learners.

Children begin learning a language from the time they are born. They learn through context, nurturing, and the language and cultural customs are around them all of the time. There is a joint venture in everyday life through socialization between children and their parents, caretakers, family members, and community members when a child is learning a language (Baron, 1992; James, 1990).

In relation to ancestral language learners who are second language learners, and are mostly older teenagers or adults, there needs to be a mechanism available for them to practice just as the opportunity was there for children when they were learning their first language. For this reason, highly proficient speakers who want the younger generations to learn Gwich'in should have the mindset to pass the language on through practice with language learners.

Taking university classes, including grammar.

Seven of the language learners—two main participants and five background participants (Maggie, Raavit, Odin, Allan, and I)—took the Gwich'in university language class which indicates commitment to learning. Taking the university Gwich'in language class relates back to the participants' desire to learn Gwich'in but had never had the opportunity to learn it in their home village or K-12 school.

Grammar is used as a tool to explain complexities of the language for the students. However, grammar by itself will not be helpful in language learning if one does not combine it with practice as some of the participants have done (Hinton, 2002; Warford, 2011).

In addition to the above strategies that language learners use, they also use these strategies: (3) supporting other language learners; (4) being positive, (5) including other media resources; (6) connecting to the past; (7) respecting the language, and (8) commitment.

Supporting other language learners.

Five of the language learners—two main participants and three background participants (Maggie, Allan, and me)—support other language learners. The two main participants are both teachers and support their students as much as possible to help them learn the language. They provide this in the form of making children feel proud of who they are as Gwich'in, infusing the language into the curriculum, creating a children's prayer book, finding funding for the bilingual program in the school, supporting the bilingual program, ensuring community involvement and appropriate behavior, being a role model, and creating a safe and positive learning environment. The background participants also overlap with the main participants but also share resources such as their university notes. The types of support mechanisms that the participants provide for others and themselves are meaningful because if others see that there is a good support system for language learning, they may change their outlook so that they are doing something about contributing to the revitalization of the language.

Being positive.

Two of the language learners—one main participant and one background participant (Allan)—use positivity as a foundation to learn the language. The focus on having a positive attitude, not only about the language extends to positive self-images of the Gwich'in people as a whole. Even though some of the negative images may be true, there are also some very positive attributes that Native people can share. Some of these positive images may portray cultural activities that are not as actively being practiced, such as trapping. Another way that

positivity is shown is through learning from travels and bringing back positive aspects to the Gwich'in group. Being positive rests on the personality of the individual, and being positive about being Gwich'in speaks loudly when it comes to language learning because it exudes outward for others to notice and be inspired.

Including other media resources and networking.

Language learning and teaching should make use of every available resource, which includes the use of media, technology, theatre or in written form. The two main participants, plus three background participants (Odin, Allan, and me) make use of these types of resources, not only for language teaching or learning, but take advantage of the social media to have a chance to write in Gwich'in and share positive information. The language is used through the arts to create awareness that Gwich'in is still spoken, and there are many books in print that focus on all manner of Gwich'in cultural practices and language. These are useful tools, because it shows the resourcefulness and adaptability of these individuals that may, in turn, catch the attention of potential language learners. Networking is an offshoot of making use of media resources because it allows learners to share their activities; therefore, making it more accessible for other language learners. In addition, Rochelle networks with other Gwich'in business owners like Odin to interject some Gwich'in language into their work, especially on clothing, bumper stickers, magnets, etc. that promote speaking Gwich'in.

The positive strategies that are utilized by Gwich'in participants for language learning or teaching are based on two ideas that drive them to learning the language. These are a sense of connection to the past and respect for the language.

Connecting to past.

Each of us as individuals come from somewhere, from family that stretches back for many generations, and we can make a connection with them by understanding their way of life and how we come to understand ourselves in that way. Through this understanding comes cultural knowledge which is tied in with the language, and then from that springs a desire for passing this knowledge on. At least three of the participants made this strong connection and expressed that they would like to learn some of the skills that the ancestors used to do. Rochelle relates this by saying, "And you know how relating with my ancestors and stuff. Things that they've done, skills that they had, I would like to learn them."

Another way to make a strong connection is through memories of ancestors and Gwich'in life through stories heard as a child. Allan had this opportunity as a child, and he feels obligated to pass this knowledge on to those who come after him. He expresses this by saying, "You want to represent all those who went before that you remember that had great stories to share and you want that story to continue." When Allan speaks the Gwich'in language, it makes him feel a strong connection to his ancestors because he is speaking the way that they spoke. He articulates this by saying, "That's a good feeling when you're able to speak in the way of your ancestors as much as possible."

Ancestors also connect us to our land. They are the ones who took care of it so that we could continue to call a place home, even if we do not necessarily live on it. They knew the ecosystem and how to live as one with it. These are the types of traits that have been passed down to us as Gwich'in that make us feel very much connected to them. As I said, "I believe our ancestors knew how to take care of the land. Our ancestors adapted according to the times, and have been innovative in doing so. Many Native people today have these same innovative traits

which have made some of these traditional skills obsolete such as the traditional skill of creating fur pants."

Our ancestors also knew all of our relations, and ensured that there were no inappropriate marriages. They knew all of the Gwich'in families and the order and ages of older to younger siblings. They passed this information on to us orally. I expressed the following about connections to ancestors. "In Gwich'in, it's important to know one's ancestors because that's how different Gwich'in knows which family you come from. That's a Gwich'in worldview which is much different than how one introduces themselves in English."

Respecting the language.

Two of the main participants and one of the background participants (Allan) spoke of respect for the language. Not only did they direct their comments about respecting the language, but that this respect is all inclusive that everything about the culture be respected. Some of these things include respect for the land, cultural practices and commitment to language learning.

Commitment for language learning.

Coupled with respect for the language and culture, and connection to the past are other positive strategies which surface for language learning. These include commitment to learning the language, ignoring obstacles, being persistent, and to listen for comprehension. If all Gwich'in language learners had these types of attitudes, it would be the greatest contribution to the activity of Gwich'in language revitalization. Foremost is the idea of *commitment* which means that when making it part of one's learning activity, the learner has to put themselves out there—to be ridiculed or put down—in the face of obstacles from which one recovers time after time. Learning any language requires commitment, which means that one is steeped in thinking and using the language.

The next chapter will use of activity theory and self as leading activity as an explanatory framework for language learning identity. The participants' stories of learning and teaching Gwich'in have highlighted the complexities inherent in ancestral language learning and in the relationship between Gwich'in language learning and identity.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter will explain the two main participants' Gwich'in language learning process and outcomes and the relationship to identity through Activity Theory and self as a leading activity. Unlike Chapter 4, where grounded theory was used as an analytical tool, the framework for Chapter 5 will be Activity Theory, in conjunction with self as a leading activity. Activity Theory and self as a leading activity provide a strong basis for explaining the complexities that are inherent in language learning and identity construction. Activity Theory, as an analytical tool, provides a means for understanding and explaining human activity, and includes other components such as motives, objectives, rules, division of labor, and community (Hashim & Jones, 2007). As a complement to Activity Theory, self as a leading activity, reveals how an individual positions herself to attain her goal, and in this case, how the main participants position themselves as Gwich'in language learners in relation to identity. The following discussion thus illustrates the two main participants' activity systems.

Genetic Domains, Language Learning and Identity

In order to understand how the human mind works, Vygotsky used genetic analysis in his research. Wertsch (1985) uses the term "genetic domains" to describe developmental analysis as consisting of four components. These domains are: (1) phylogenesis, which is the development of a group of organisms, most notably primates; (2) the sociocultural domain, which is the history of how cultures develop over time; (3) ontogenesis, which is the development of an individual; and (4) microgenesis, which is development in moment to moment learning (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

From the viewpoint of language learning, the sociocultural, ontogenetic and microgenetic domains are most relevant to this research because respectively they (1) provide the history of

ancestral language use and decline; (2) reveal how an individual language learner develops as they learn their language; and (3) demonstrate how an idea develops through different stages over time. These three domains fit well with Indigenous ways of thinking and doing because they are all interconnected and focus on how individual development is both linked to the development of individuals and connected to larger socio-cultural and socio-political factors. Martin (2008), in explaining Aboriginal worldviews in their relationship to each other and the physical and spiritual world defines relatedness as "sets of conditions, processes, and practices that occur among and between elements of a particular place, and across contexts that are physical, social, political, and intellectual" (p. 61). Relatedness binds Indigenous language learners to the ancestors. The knowledge of Indigenous relatedness and Vygotsky's genetic domains mutually inform each other.

The Sociocultural Domain

The concept of 'mediation' through which individuals can transform the world is central to the sociocultural domain. Mediation can occur in the form of physical or mental tools, but the most powerful tool is that of language (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Moll, 2000; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Language serves to connect the past with the present, and this central role of language becomes evident in this research on Gwich'in language learning and identity development.

The background participants serve as a window to the larger context for understanding the ontogenesis and microgenesis of the two main participants' identities, along with their language abilities. As discussed in Chapter 4, the older generations of background participants were Gwich'in first language speakers. However, with the encroachment of mandatory schools for subsequent generations, language shift to English occurred, and to this day, English is used almost exclusively for communication for day-to-day living. Nonetheless, some background

participants who are 50 and under have taken it upon themselves to learn their ancestral language. An often cited reason for learning Gwich'in among this group is that knowing the language provides a strong connection to ancestors, and provides a healthy sense of identity. Although having a desire to learn the language is a strong start, there also needs to be in place, ample opportunities to learn and use the language. The history of how we got to the point over time began when boarding schools were introduced to the Alaskan Native peoples. The ideology behind boarding schools was that Alaska Natives and other Indigenous peoples could be assimilated into mainstream society by removing children from their communities (Barnhardt, 2001; Hirshberg & Sharp, 2005; Kroskrity & Field, 2009). The federal government administered these schools, but other schools were contracted to various churches, such as the Episcopal, Catholic, Evangelical, Methodist, Moravian, Congregational, and Swedish-Evangelical. One of the strictest rules in these schools was an "English-Only" policy (Barnhardt, 2001; Hirshberg & Sharp, 2005).

The effects of the boarding schools on students, their families and communities were both positive and negative. Some of the positive effects were experiencing the world outside of their communities, creating lasting relationships with other students of different cultures, some supportive school personnel, high academic expectations, and discipline and structure to their daily life in school.

The negative effects, also known as historical trauma, were devastating for many of the Indigenous peoples because they experienced physical and psychological abuse, as well as sexual abuse (Hirshberg & Sharp, 2005). One of the reasons for physical abuse occurred when students communicated in their own language with each other. In interviews with Hirshberg and Sharp (2005), students who went to boarding schools stated that if they were caught using their

Native language(s), they would be "beaten and whipped" (p. 11). The consequences of being abused for speaking their ancestral language contributed to the rapid pace of language loss (Hirshberg & Sharp, 2005). Therefore, following generations (children and grandchildren) did not learn their ancestral language. These "children" are now in their 60s, but their children are now in their 40s or under. Some individuals in this last group now have a strong desire to reawaken their ancestral language. One of the ways these young adults are striving to attain their ancestral language is through schooling, mainly through the university (Sikorski, 2008). They have a strong desire to pass the language on to their children. Rochelle and Charleen, the focal participants in this research, are among this group. Below are some excerpts of participants who seek opportunities to use the language as they are learning Gwich'in:

> A. Hayton "[speaks] with students, with yourself, with relatives, Gwich'in speakers. I also use the language on Facebook and emails and sometimes when I see others, we speak to each other."
>
> H. Peter "I use it [language] with my family, other speakers, learners, and students in the Gwich'in language class. I use the language when I know the person is a speaker, latent speaker or a learner, and it doesn't matter to me where they are."
>
> O. Peter-Raboff "I'm just trying to teach my kids a few things [language]."
>
> Raavit "[I speak with] my Mom and grandmother."

The Ontogenetic Domain

Every person has a personal history, which is important to understand in the larger scheme of language learning or teaching. It is important because a learner's personal history and experiences effect the ways in which individuals navigate all life situations, including language learning. When applied to exploring language learning, ontogenesis brings the individual history of a person to the forefront. This is particularly insightful when trying to understand how

ancestral language learning is linked to identity (Canagarajah, 2004; González, 2005; Hoffman, 1990).

The ontogenesis of the focal participants—Rochelle and Charleen—reflect how their own personal histories affect the activities they carry out in the microgenesis of their language identity, discussed later.

Rochelle was raised in Fort Yukon and Beaver, Alaska; two Gwich'in villages. No one in Rochelle's household spoke any Gwich'in, and she was surrounded by the English language. She attended high school in both of these villages, and then briefly in a boarding school in southeast Alaska. When attending high school in Fort Yukon, she was enrolled in a bilingual class where the focus was on cultural norms. After graduating from high school, Rochelle left Alaska to attend an art institute in the Lower 48, and upon her graduation, she returned to Alaska. Rochelle continued with her education at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) and obtained her BA in art with a minor in Native languages. During her studies at UAF, she became deeply interested in the university Gwich'in language classes that were offered, and thus began her microgenesis for Gwich'in language learning.

Charleen's roots are in Beaver, Alaska but she also lived in various Gwich'in villages and Alaska's second largest city, Fairbanks. Charleen grew up in a multi-generational household, which included her parents, grandmother, and siblings. Gwich'in and English were spoken in the household, and Charleen could understand commands in Gwich'in directed at her; mostly by her grandmother. Her mother was of the boarding school generation, and although she was a latent speaker, her speaking proficiency was limited. However, this did not deter Charleen's mother from making sure that some of the Gwich'in language was passed on to Charleen from her grandmother.

While living in Beaver at a young age, and then later on in her adolescence, Charleen heard at least three different languages being spoken in Beaver. They were the Gwich'in and Koyukon Athabascan languages, and Iñupiaq Eskimo. Hearing the combination of these languages was confusing to Charleen because she could not differentiate between what the meanings were in each of the languages, and so the languages became blended enough so that she was unsure about interpretations. In addition, she also heard the liturgical languages in the church, which were prayers and songs in Gwich'in, Iñupiaq, and English.

When Charleen began to work on her postsecondary degrees, she continued to live in either Beaver or Chalkyitsik. There are a lot of activities, such as carnivals, spending time with others, dances, etc. that occur in the various Gwich'in villages, therefore much interaction takes place in the Gwich'in or English languages. It is during these times that Charleen uses formulaic phrases in Gwich'in. Formulaic phrases are language that does not vary, such as "Neenjit dôonch'yaa?" (how are you?") or answering "Sheenjit gwinzįį. Nan aii yù'?" (I'm fine. How about you?).

As demonstrated above, the ontogenesis of the two main participants is very personal and they differ widely in the sphere of language learning. Ontogenesis affects what an individual does over time for language learning, which is known as microgenesis.

The Microgenetic Domain

'Microgenesis' refers to the development of a feeling or an idea on a shorter time scale than ontogenesis. 'Microgenesis' focuses on the moment-to-moment events as one learns something (Wertsch, 1985). Analyzing language learning within the microgenetic domain allows an individual or a researcher to chronicle the "time scale of actual communicative interaction" (Sinha, 2015, p. 11). It also leads to understanding the moment-to-moment actions that may

support or hinder language learning. Each individual carries out his/her language learning goals in different ways, as is the case for the two focal participants.

Rochelle, from a young age, had a strong desire to learn her ancestral language because she heard her grandmother giving commands to her cousin who could understand what was being said. Rochelle wanted to be able to understand what was being said, and so when she went to school, she was part of the K-12 bicultural program where they heard a little of the language through cultural activities.

Rochelle's Gwich'in language learning continued on into the university where the emphasis was on having conversations through speaking, grammar, reading, and writing. In addition to taking two years of classes that were offered in Gwich'in, she also took individual study classes that focused on Gwich'in teaching, learning, and research. After all of these classes, Rochelle attained enough proficiency to be able to create sentences and ask questions on a Novice Mid-level for interpersonal communication (ACTFL, 2015).

While Rochelle was taking Gwich'in language classes at the university, she hosted regular meeting times at her house for other interested learners, so that they could discuss vocabulary meanings, phrases or grammar points. In the Gwich'in population, Rochelle was keenly aware of language learners and speakers. She used this to her advantage by interacting and practicing what she knew with them, especially the elders, who are much respected amongst Gwich'in people. Rochelle is also an artist, and at one point, she became an artist-in-residence for the Yukon Flats School District where she was required to travel to all of the Gwich'in villages to teach art to K-12 students. This provided an excellent opportunity to infuse Gwich'in into her art lessons for the students, and to visit with community members to practice and learn

more Gwich'in. Overall, Rochelle maintains a positive attitude about learning Gwich'in, and at home teaches her children what she knows.

Charleen has always had an intense interest in the Gwich'in language, but has never learned to speak the language. As she was growing up, she heard Gwich'in spoken in her household by her grandmother, as she lived in a household of three generations—her maternal grandmother, her parents, and her siblings. Charleen's mother was a K-12 school teacher, and in the school, she made sure the Gwich'in language was used in school projects, such as making traditional Gwich'in clothing.

For many years, the Yukon Flats School District, where Charleen works, maintained a bilingual class for K-12 students, but over the years the administrators diminished these classes to the point where bilingual classes are no longer offered. Charleen is a principal-teacher in a small village, where she uses this role to advocate for keeping a bilingual teacher and to seek funding for language learning to occur for students. One of the ways that she supports language learning in the school is to interject the language in all of the subjects, whether it is science, math, or the arts. The Gwich'in language is an integral part of the school, and she makes sure that each child is learning Gwich'in by helping to create a safe environment for language learning. Charleen is tireless and sincere in her work to support Gwich'in language revitalization efforts through the schools, community, and church.

In sum, the microgenesis of both Rochelle's and Charleen's identity in language learning has taken different routes, but in general, the main goal is to make language maintenance and revitalization a priority in their lives. Their ontogenesis is embedded within the history of their people, and this phenomenon affects what their leading activity is for language learning.

Activity Theory

Vygotsky's sociocultural, ontogenetic, and microgenetic domains are all interrelated and dynamic. Activity Theory unifies these domains, and brings into clarity any type of pressure that may occur for language learning, which may create a possibility for transformation. Figure 5.1 below demonstrates the three genetic domains within the analytical framework of Activity Theory.

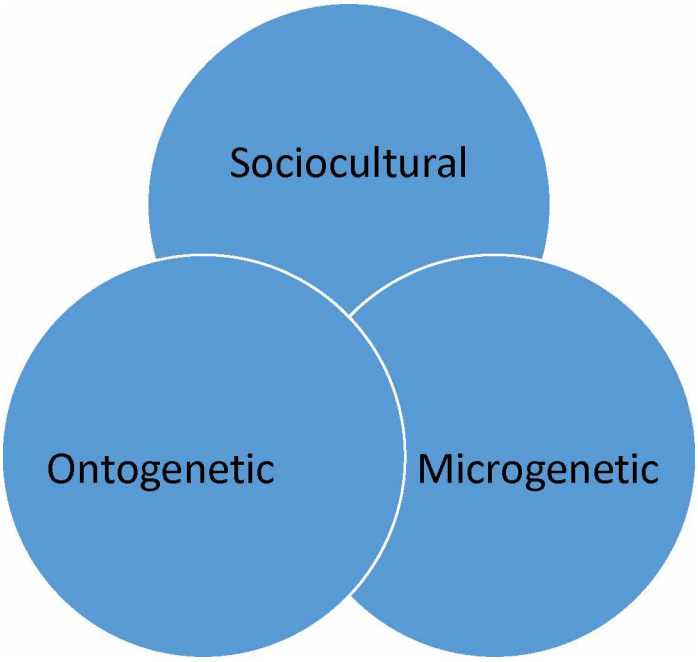

Figure 5.1. Sociocultural, Ontogenesis, Microgenesis Domains within AT Framework

The main reasons to use Activity Theory (AT) are that it unifies the three genetic domains—sociocultural, ontogenetic and microgenetic—and fits into this research for language learning as a process. One of the contributions that AT provides is to think about individuals' histories which are instrumental in interpreting their behavior and actions for language learning. AT also brings to light the social structures that shape an individual within the larger context of their community and/or culture. Finally, AT unravels the complexities of language learning by

accentuating potential roles and responsibilities of language learners, speakers, teachers and their interactions.

As discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, Activity Theory originated from the work of the Russian psychologist Vygotsky, who posited that cognitive and social development are mediated by ideas and culture, and that language is a crucial tool in these processes. After Vygotsky's death, his colleague Leont'ev further developed Activity Theory. Leont'ev's analysis of an activity system consisted of three levels, which he identified by posing three questions. (Level 1: Activity-Motive) Why does something take place?; (Level 2: Action-Goal) What takes place?, and (Level 3: Operation-Conditions) How is it carried out?

When using Activity Theory as an analytic framework, understanding the relationship between goals/motives and outcomes sheds light on the nature of the activity system. Leont'ev (1981) provided an example of this type of analysis in relation to a collective hunt by primitive hunters. Leont'ev describes two groups of hunters. One group would beat the bushes scaring the animals. The scared animals would then run towards the other group of hunters where they were slaughtered. The hunters' *activity* was shaped by their *motive*, which was to go on a communal hunt in order to provide food or clothing for their families. The hunters' *actions* were shaped by their *goals* which was to scare the animals so that they ran towards the other group. The hunters' *operations* was shaped by the *conditions* (Leont'ev, 1981). The conditions in this example of hunting, could, for instance, depend on the type of terrain, weather conditions, time of year, type of animal hunted, etc. (Ballantyne, 2005).

Table 5.1: Rochelle's Statements on Leont'ev's Three Levels of Activity Theory.

Level	**Underlying Concepts**	**Question being Answered**	**Actions and Motivations**	**Rochelle's Statements**
1. Activity	Motive	Why does something take place?	Desire to learn her ancestral language.	"I've always wanted to learn Gwich'in"
2. Action	Goal and sub goals	What takes place?	(1) Be able to understand other proficient speakers; (2) Be able to speak Gwich'in, and learn more vocabulary	"Man! I want to know what she's saying." "I have lots to learn but I can understand."
3. Operation	Conditions	How is it carried out?	(1) Enroll in high school bilingual classes; (2) Enroll in university Gwich'in language classes; (3) Practice with other L2 learners; (4) Tour other Indigenous language programs; (5) Speak to children; Visit and speak with elders and others in the community. (7) Incorporates Gwich'in language into her art business.	"…in Fort Yukon I always took [Name's] bilingual class" "I just jumped at it because it seemed like a good place to learn while I'm in college." "We all pushed each other too because we used to all study together." "one thing I realized when we went there [HI] is what are we going to speak about?" "I would talk to the kids "I would talk to the kids" "I would go out and visit elders and meet people in the community" "It [gwinzịį] makes it positive and it makes what you're doing good. So that's why I use Gwinzịį Studios"

Beginning with Leont'ev's concepts of analysis for an activity, in level 1 for the activity-motive, Rochelle, from a young age, had a strong desire to learn Gwich'in. In level 2 for action,

goal and sub goals, Rochelle wanted to be able to understand other speakers of Gwich'in, and be able to speak and learn more of the language. For level 3, operation and conditions, Rochelle took several actions on her desire to learn Gwich'in by: (1) enrolling in bilingual classes at the high school level; (2) enrolling in the university Gwich'in language classes, where she took three years of Gwich'in, which included advanced classes on Gwich'in traditional stories and language learning and teaching; (3) developing close friendships with her fellow classmates, and studying and practicing the Gwich'in language by having regularly scheduled meetings at her house; (4) touring other Indigenous language programs, such as the University of Hawai'i's language program; (5) sharing the Gwich'in language with children; (6) visiting with Gwich'in elders and community members; and (7) using the name "gwinzįį" (good, in general terms) in her studio business. Table 5.1 describes Rochelle's activity system in the framework of Leont'ev's three levels of activity.

Table 5.2 is an example of Charleen's efforts to secure funding for Gwich'in to be taught at the K-12 school on the three levels of activity in Leont'ev's unit of analysis with the addition of what she expressed.

Table 5.2: Charleen's Statements on Leontev's Three Levels of Activity Theory.

Level	**Underlying Concepts**	**Question being Answered**	**Actions and motivations**	**Statement**
Activity	Motive	Why does something take place?	Create opportunities for K-12 to learn Gwich'in	"My priorities are my students and my children and their language learning…my obligation to my students is STRONG."
Action	Goal and sub goals	What takes place?	Infuse Gwich'in language into daily school lessons and activities	"[Gwich'in Aide teaches Gwich'in] all morning and then in the afternoon we have some younger students with [Gwich'in Aide] and in

				the afternoon we're teaching academic subjects. But they're also being exposed to Gwich'in commands. In the yearbook we have lots of [Gwich'in and English] language, and we try to include that in all of our projects."
Operation	Conditions	How is it carried out?	Find funding opportunities	"Part of my administrative duties is to supplement [the bilingual] program. I have to lobby for these things that are available to us."

Charleen, in Leontev's activity analysis framework, concentrated on making it possible for her K-12 students to be exposed to the Gwich'in language in their daily lives during the school year. Since the school discontinued the bilingual program, Charleen secured funding through resources available to the school. Obtaining funding was a successful endeavor, which provided job security for the Gwich'in language instructor who is a highly proficient speaker and also a Gwich'in Native language teacher.

On the surface, the activity systems described through Leont'ev's three levels appear very different for Rochelle and Charleen. However, in these underlying differences, there is a shared goal of language revitalization or maintenance.

In moving forward to the time of this writing, Engeström has further expanded Leont'ev's activity system through the addition of rules, community, and division of labor. In addition Stetsenko and Arievitch (2004) have coupled the concept of self-as-leading-activity

with Activity Theory. The role of the agentive self plays a major role in Gwich'in language learning and identity formation because it highlights what an individual is doing (or not). Using Engeström's expanded activity system, each participant's activity system can now be placed on a network that includes the concepts of rules, community, and division of labor, as seen in Figures 5.2 and 5.3.

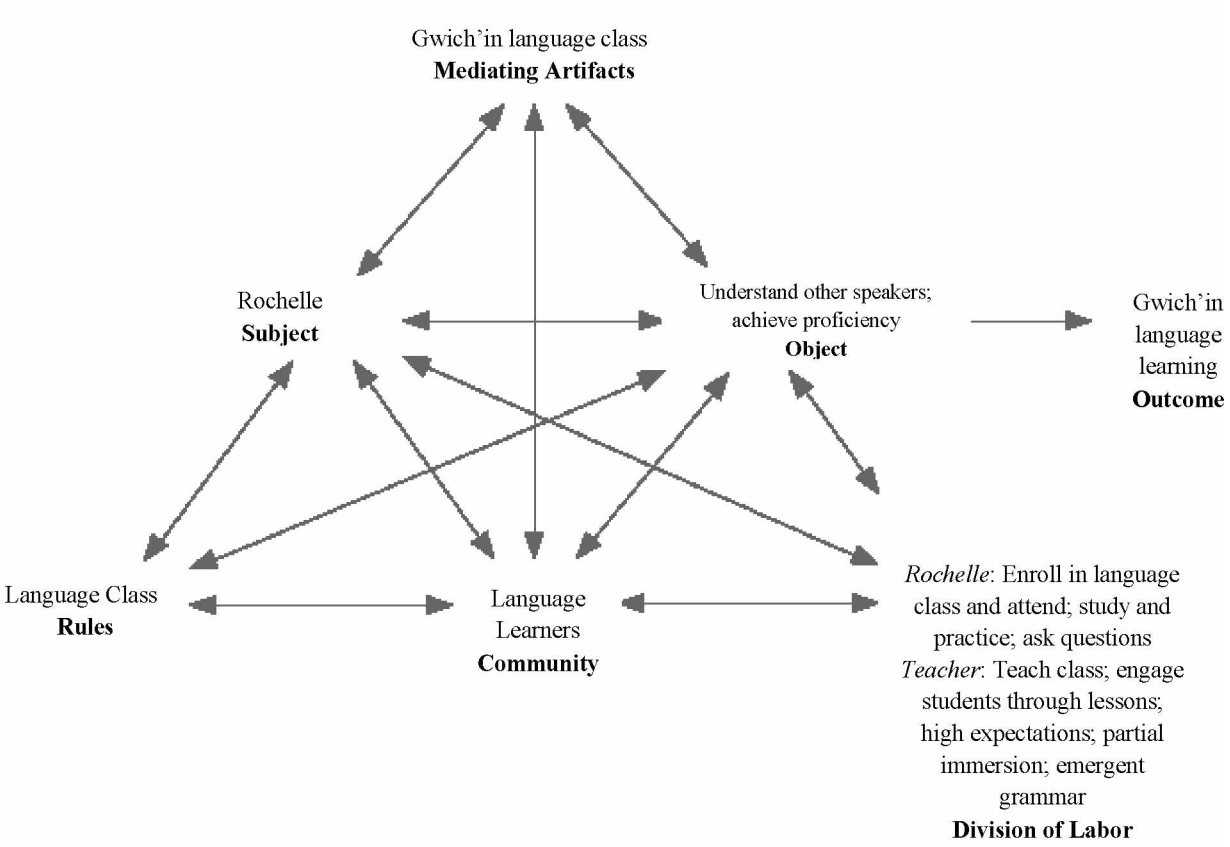

Figure 5.2. Rochelle's Activity System with Addition of Rules, Community and Division of Labor.

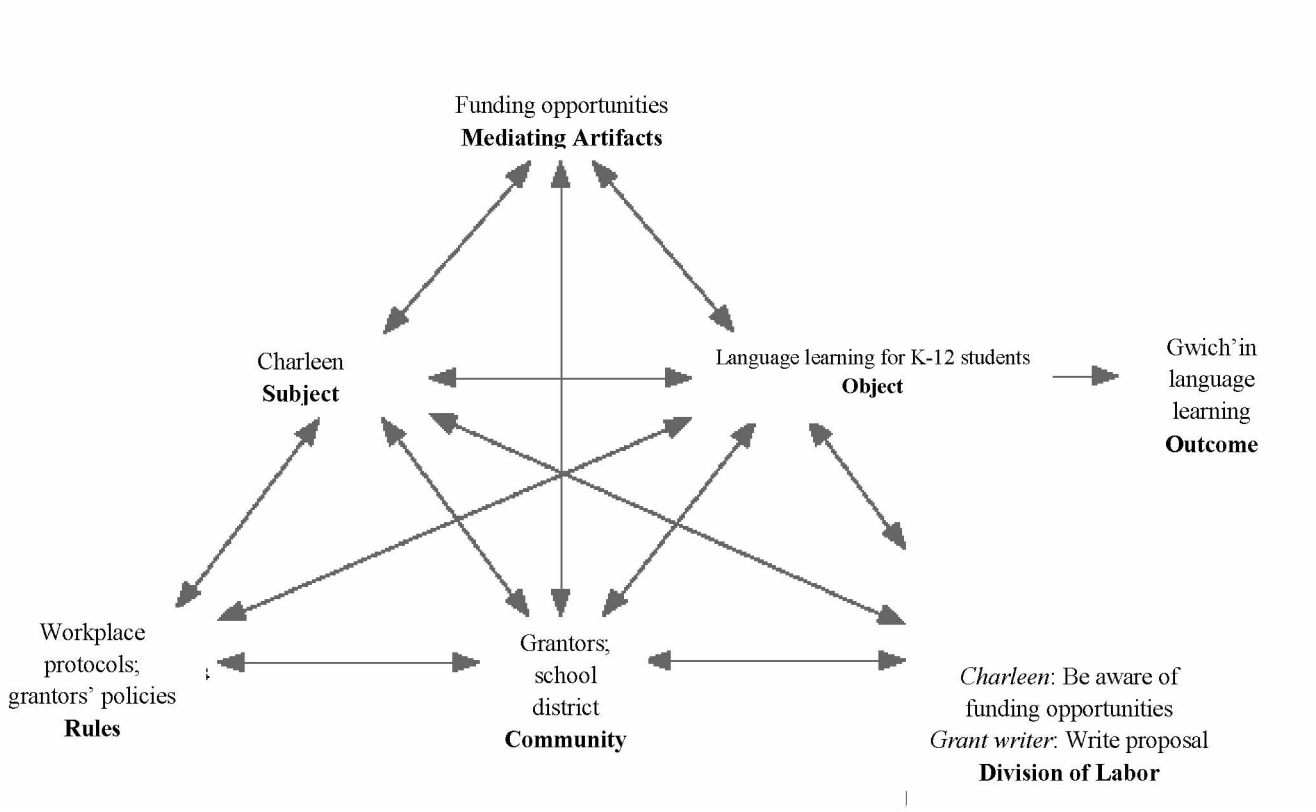

Figure 5.3. Charleen's Activity System with Addition of Rules, Community and Division of Labor.

Figures 5.2 and 5.3 provides an example of the expanded Gwich'in learning activity system of both Rochelle and Charleen. Even though the goals appear to be different, the overarching outcome of their activities are for the greater good of the Gwich'in community at large, in the form of language revitalization. Within the nodes of an activity system, one node cannot exist without the other being affected. They are all necessary parts of an ecosystem which are part of the social fabric that affects subjects and vice versa. Therefore, each of Engeström's contributions will be discussed for Rochelle and Charleen.

Community

In Engeström's model, the community is the social group with which the subject interacts. The subject, in this case is Rochelle, while the object is what she would like to achieve.

The object is achieved through a mediating artifact (see Chapter 2 for a more thorough discussion). For the purposes of this research focusing on Gwich'in language learning, one of the mediating artifacts Rochelle has access to is the university Gwich'in class. As a student in that Gwich'in language class, her immediate community are the other language learners in the classroom. They have formed a group so that they make it possible to interact and practice vocabulary, grammar concepts, etc. as they are learning the language both inside and outside of the classroom.

Charleen's community consists of the mediating artifacts that are available to the school district for whom she works. As an administrator, she is aware of these funding opportunities, and applies for them so that she is able to support Gwich'in language learning for her students. Charleen and her students are all stakeholders in a multicultural school community.

Rules

Rules in an activity system govern how an activity takes place. The rules may be formal or informal (Russell, 2001; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). The formal rules that Rochelle utilizes are general university regulations. General university regulations include grading, attendance, class standing, etc. (University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2017). In addition to general university regulations, Rochelle also has to keep in mind informal rules, specific to the Gwich'in language classroom, such as trying to stay in the target language as much as possible, avoiding cell phone use during class, being on time, not worrying about making mistakes, etc. (Sikorski, 2008).

For Charleen, the formal rules by which she has to abide are the protocols of her workplace and the stipulations of the grantors. Charleen has to work within the hierarchies established by her school district. Once Charleen identifies a funding source, she has to utilize a grant writer. After the grant is written, then the written document has to be approved by the

superintendent (Yukon Flats School District, 2018). Once Charleen receives the grant, she then has to acknowledge the guidelines and reporting requirements of the grantor (United States Department of Education, 2018). Other rules include executing the grant by making sure the Gwich'in language teacher is supported, and that students are provided the opportunity to learn the Gwich'in language.

Division of Labor

Division of labor refers to "how tasks are shared among the community" (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). The division of labor is fluid because of new affordances or opportunities and constraints that can happen in any of the other nodes of an activity system (Russell, 2001; Swain, et al., 2011). Being aware of the new affordances and constraints sheds light on the complexities of language learning, and thus how it affects one's identity.

The application of division of labor in Rochelle's activity system of formal Gwich'in learning includes at least two parties. On the one hand, Rochelle as a language learner and on the other hand, the instructor of the Gwich'in language class; each with their own roles governed by the division of labor, typical in a university classroom. Broadly, the main role of Rochelle, as a student, was to register for the language class, and to attend, study, and practice speaking the language. The role and responsibility of the instructor is to create: (a) a dynamic classroom; (b) a safe learning environment; and (c) high expectations of the students over the course of the semester.

When looking at individuals' actions through the lens of division of labor, one can see what different parties are doing for language learning and teaching, and how subsequent actions intersect with identity formation. Not all of Alaska's Indigenous languages are taught at the university, so having Gwich'in available as a university class was an affordance for Rochelle. It

was her personal choice to enroll in the class, and as stated earlier, Rochelle had "always wanted to learn" Gwich'in. At the time that Rochelle enrolled in the class, the class had been taught for only three years, and was in the early stages of development by the instructor. The role the instructor played in developing the class was based on tenets of second language acquisition. A crucial affordance the instructor had was the real life experience of learning Gwich'in as an adult, and thereby creating the class as a safe environment for adults learning a second language. As a baseline, these affordances available to Rochelle and the instructor are only the beginning of a myriad of affordances.

Rochelle, after taking three years of Gwich'in language learning became confident with her knowledge of the Gwich'in language, and began to branch out to the Gwich'in community by speaking with those who are known speakers or learners. Learning Gwich'in, for Rochelle, changed her identity as a Gwich'in person from one who was not just knowledgeable about the culture, but was now able to make connections with the language. Community members, including children and her peers were happy for her use and knowledge of the language.

The division of labor in Charleen's activity system consist of Charleen and her interactions with her employees, the Yukon Flats School District, the bilingual teacher, and her students. The roles and responsibilities of Charleen is to be attentive when there are grants available for which she can apply, and the roles and responsibilities of her employer are to make sure that she receives information for grants from various resources, and to support her to obtain them. Once Charleen receives funding, she then hires the bilingual teacher, who is highly proficient in the Gwich'in language, and has experience teaching K-12 students. The role and responsibility of the bilingual teacher is to be available to teach. An affordance that is available to the bilingual teacher is that he continues to work in his field of expertise, which is Gwich'in

language teaching. If the funding is not obtained, he would no longer have a job because his previous position as a teacher's aide is no longer funded by the school district. One of the main reasons that Charleen seeks funding for the school is so that students in the Beaver school are exposed to the Gwich'in language and culture. She views this exposure to the Gwich'in language and culture as a connection between language and identity.

From the above discussion of Activity Theory, it is evident that its uses are versatile. Applying Activity Theory as an analytic framework for investigating ancestral language learning seems particularly appropriate because it is a process that includes many key players, and sometimes contradictions or tensions occur that may affect the various nodes of an activity system. Some researchers (see for example Stetsenko and Arievitch, 2010) have criticized Activity Theory for overemphasizing the role of the group in an activity system and not focusing on the individual him/herself. This is a serious criticism for researchers trying to gain insights into identity development, which necessarily needs to examine the individual. This is an issue that the concept of Self as a Leading Activity is trying to address.

Self as a Leading Activity

Stetsenko and Arievitch (2004) explain self as leading activity builds on sociocultural theory and Activity Theory by emphasizing the concept of "self". In this view, opportunities for transformation to occur hinge on what people are doing (or not). Specifically "self as a leading activity" is "a process of real-life activity that most explicitly positions individuals to meaningfully contribute to the ongoing social collaborative practices in the world" (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004, p. 493). Each individual then, through her overall process of real-life activity position herself to represent various roles. This real-life activity is a process that is agentive and unique for each individual (Hull & Katz, 2006; Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004). The "self" is

enacted through the leading activity, or put another way, the leading activity is at the center of the "self". As discussed in Chapter 2, Ryle (1999) explains that the activity in Activity Theory is "high-level, motivated thinking, doing and being of an individual in a given social context" (p. 413). In contrast, agentive activities are how people think for themselves and "act in ways that shape their experiences and life trajectories" (Cole, 2018, p. 1). For instance, Rochelle, through her agentive activities, primarily represents herself as a language learner, and also as a language teacher, artist, and as being family-oriented. Charleen primarily represents herself as a school administrator, and through this role, seeks funding for language learning, because she is dedicated for the well-being of her students, and, like Rochelle, as being family-oriented.

In the process of language learning, contradictions and tensions do occur for both Rochelle and Charleen, but what they actually do helps them to respond to those tensions or contradictions. Stetsenko and Arievitch, (2004), state the

> processes of 'doing' the self, so clearly conveyed by the notion of it being a leading *activity,* include the ways by which people respond to challenges and conflicts in their lives, how they internalize, interpret and also further develop the sociocultural rules and standards of what it takes to be a human being. (p. 494)

Tables 5.3 and 5.4 depict what the two focal participants do in light of coming up against any contradictions or tensions. Even though the agentive selves of Rochelle and Charleen are very different, the underlying goal or outcome for both in an activity system depicts their passion for the perpetuation of the Gwich'in language. Both accomplish this underlying goal through their leading activity.

Table 5.3: Rochelle's Leading Activity.

Leading Activity	**What is Rochelle doing?**	**Tensions & Contradictions**
Being a language learner, and using whatever resources are available to make the most of it.	I always took [Name's] bilingual class.	*Bilingual programs:* It was like for an hour a day. We used to just kind of go hang out. We just went and ate crackers and drank tea and did beadwork and learned Gwich'in words. I just learned like one word not in any context or anything.
Staying positive Building awareness of identity as a Gwich'in person Communicating and sharing awareness to subsequent generations.	And I just wanted to open their [children] perspective on our Gwich'in communities and like a global sense. …what I did have was I wanted to [learn the language]. I wanted to learn and I have deep respect for the culture. I want my kids to know that our culture is just as valid as mainstream or western culture. That we are different and we have our ways, and our language is just as valid and just as important even if we don't see it on TV every day or something. I feel like when you add "gwinzįį" like even when learning Gwich'in if you say "gwinzįį dee'in" or something. It just adds "make it good". It makes it positive and it makes what you're doing good.	*Support*: We do all need to be supportive of each other. it seems like the generation before us is really negative [about language learning] or maybe like our grandparents age. we're all going to have to stick together and be supportive and quit being so negative with each other. … there's a lot of people who will just kind of laugh at you
Visiting and respecting elders, and informing them that she is learning the language.	I asked people to speak to me and I told them I was learning and stuff. And so I got practice. I had that alone time with myself so I would go out and visit elders and meet people in the community.	*Practice:* I need lots of practice. Really bad. I mean I can get by barely.

Rochelle's leading activity (Table 5.3) is to continue to learn to speak Gwich'in by being active in the community and using all opportunities available to her, such as letting others know

that she is learning the language, and would like to practice with other more proficient Gwich'in speakers. However, in her activity system, there appear tensions and contradictions, such as a lack of support from community members, not being able to practice for speaking, and bilingual classes as more of a bicultural class. Making communities aware of these types of tensions and contradictions for ancestral language learners is a good step for language revitalization.

Table 5.4: Charleen's Leading Activity.

Leading Activity	**What is Charleen doing?**	**Tensions & Contradictions**
Advocate for seeking funds to perpetuate use of Gwich'in language in all school subjects.	I invest a lot of my time in my students [K-12] in providing a good learning environment for them to learn Gwich'in.	*School role:* The school district does not have a current bilingual program so they don't have a separate budget [for] bilingual teachers or Gwich'in teachers or any Native speaker. [name] would be doing aide duties. [S/He] would be sitting in a teacher's classroom assisting other students, which I think is a tremendous waste of resources.

Charleen's leading activity (Table 5.4) is to obtain funding for her K-12 students, so that it is possible for them to be taught Gwich'in by an aide who is a highly proficient speaker of Gwich'in and a language teacher. She wants to ensure that the students are learning Gwich'in in a safe learning environment. However, the tensions and contradictions that she encounters is the lack of support from the school district by cutting bilingual classes, therefore, not take advantage of the talents of highly proficient and talented Gwich'in speakers. By cutting the bilingual program from the school, the school district sends a message that the status of Gwich'in language learning is not an important part of schooling for K-12 Gwich'in students.

Recommendations

The theories (Sociocultural theory, Activity Theory, Investment, and Self as a Leading Activity) used throughout this dissertation have useful ramifications for language learning and teaching. Sociocultural theory provides a backdrop for the history of individuals, which is important information for understanding events throughout an individual's lifespan, and how this affects that individual's actions. Activity Theory can be a useful tool to explore and better understand issues of language learning and identity. Self as a leading activity focuses on what is important for an individual to pursue, and their actions in that pursuit.

In language learning, like all other learning, there may be contradictions and tensions. These might result in obstacles for language learning. Language learners have to depend on other more proficient speakers because, undoubtedly they will want to ask questions because they simply do not know the answer, or want to know more. The contribution that Activity Theory provides is that it makes a connection between the community, types of rules associated, and the division of labor for all involved in the process of language learning. For community members, such as other language learners or highly proficient speakers, it is vital to provide support, and to be patient and kind as language learners go through the process of learning their ancestral language. A person learning her ancestral language is easily intimidated, and sometimes, all it takes for a language learner to quit is one adverse remark. This means that there is one less language learner to carry on our Indigenous languages.

This research on ancestral language learning and effects on identity has conveyed that being Gwich'in encompasses a myriad of identities. Being Gwich'in does not hinge solely on knowing your language. There are other shared features of Gwich'in culture that identifies a person as being Gwich'in, such as: an individual's ancestors; traditional activities such as sewing

or hunting; or connections to place. In addition, Gwich'in identity is fluid, and changes throughout a person's lifetime as events unfold.

Yamagata-Lynch and Smaldino (2007) used Activity Theory as a framework to evaluate K-12 and university partnerships. Through discussing the elements of Activity Theory with stakeholders, the researchers heard that expectations of each group were disparate, and created tensions that were not productive. Once these tensions were identified through the activity analyses, members from each group began to have sincere discussions that led to new and constructive partnerships between the K-12 and university participants.

Figure 5.4 depicts possible tensions/contradictions between the language learner and the division of labor in which the responsibilities of others involved could be other community members and their roles. There exists a tension between tools and community because the subject needs to have access to a larger cohort of language learners so that there is mutual support. In addition, another important tension that needs to be addressed is between the subject and the division of labor. The speakers and other users of the language need to provide positive support, and practice patience and kindness. Language learners need to be persistent, rather than yield to negative reactions. Fundamental to the goal of Gwich'in language learning is that language learners and those who are more proficient in Gwich'in, need to develop mutual understandings about their experiences and histories around language use. Table 5.5 provides some understandings that can occur between learners and speakers.

Table 5.5: Understanding Experiences of Both Learners and Speakers.

Language Speaker	Language Learner
Understand why it is important for L2 to learn their ancestral language.	Understand the trauma that speakers endured regarding intergenerational transmission and language use.
Say kind words to encourage learning.	Understand indirect sentences, which imply wanting something or wanting something done, i.e., "I need to go to the store, but no ride." (knowing fully well that you have a car).
Speak clearly and slow rate of speech. .	Work with the speaker to point out what is helpful in language learning.
Understand that language learners need repetition.	Understand that as a language learner, you must make a conscious effort to learn.
Understand that language learner will make mistakes. Correct them gently.	Understand that as a language learner, you will make mistakes.
Convey understanding by using props.	
Understand why learner has not learned their language.	
Understand that language learning takes a lot of time.	

As a concrete example, the application of Activity Theory for Indigenous language learning will be illustrated to understand the language learning process and roles of community members, such as the elders, speakers, teachers, and co-learners. Using Activity Theory can help explain for language learners and others, the rules, division of labor, and help identify tensions or contradictions between what the community want to see happen for language learning. The application of Activity Theory can also help communities understand what sometimes happens when learners are discouraged by criticism.

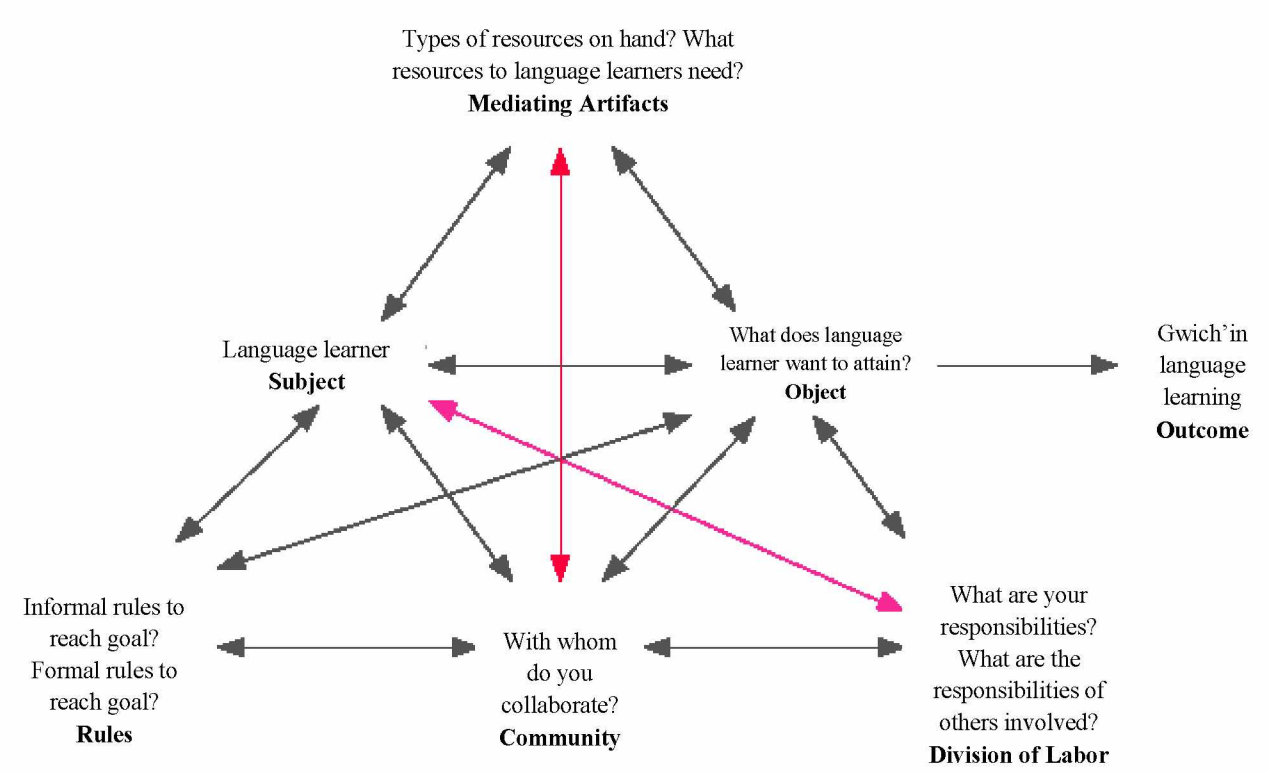

Figure 5.4. Application of Activity Theory for Gwich'in Language Learning and Tensions or Contradictions Depicted by Colored Lines.

Based on what I have learned about Activity Theory for ancestral language learning, I would like to organize a gathering of Gwich'in learners, speakers and teachers. Following Yamagata-Lynch and Smaldino (2007), this language gathering of key players would introduce stakeholders to the elements of AT as a way to identify tensions and identify concrete ideas for practice and research to support the shared goal of Gwich'in language learning.

As language learners, we can all learn our ancestral language, no matter at what age. If learning our ancestral languages is our main leading activity, we may come to understand and overcome tensions, and take actions that make this happen and support each other. This requires the cooperation of both language learners and speakers to work together.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval

(907) 474-7800

Institutional Review Board

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(907) 474-5444 fax fyirb@uaf.edu www.uaf.edu/irb

May 26, 2010

To: Sabine Siekmann, Ph.D. Principal Investigator

From: University of Alaska Fairbanks IRB

Re: [172230-1] Ancestral Language Learning and Effects on Identity

Thank you for submitting the Amendment/Modification referenced below. The submission was handled by Expedited Review under the requirements of 45 CFR 46.110, which identifies the categories of research eligible for expedited review.

Title:	Ancestral Language Learning and Effects on Identity
Received:	May 24, 2010
Expedited Category:	7
Action:	APPROVED
Effective Date:	May 26, 2010
Expiration Date:	December 4, 2010

This action is included on the June 25, 2010 IRB Agenda.

No changes may be made to this project without the prior review and approval of the IRB. This includes, but is not limited to, changes in research scope, research tools, consent documents, personnel, or record storage location.

Appendix B: Questions Main Participants

Ancestral Language Learning and Effects on Identity

Open-ended Interview Script for main participants

Interviewer: First of all, I would like to say màhsi' choo (big thank you) for talking to me. Before I begin, I want to make sure you are still willing to be a part of this study.

I would like to go over this form [informed consent] with you again before we start. Here is a copy of the form. Do you have any questions for me about it? [review form with participant].

Is it OK to record our session? Màhsi' (thank you). Akò' (and now) – the recorder is on.

Interviewer: [State date and location] I am doing an interview to find out about learning the Gwich'in language. Can you please say your name and home community for the record?

Interviewer: I want to remind you that this interview is completely voluntary, and you can ask me to stop the recording at any time. I can also destroy the recording and my notes on this interview if you ask me to, and you can request this at any time up until my research is published.

Is it OK with you if we keep going?

Interviewer: This interview will not have any structure to it, so you can feel free to focus on what you feel is important. I would like to remind you that you can and should avoid any topics that are uncomfortable.

Each week that I am in the community, I will conduct open-ended interviews at least one time per week. I will bring up some things that I have observed, and have been thinking about. By doing this, it will verify my understanding of what they mean. These open-ended interviews will be audiotaped.

The following are a list of topics that will be used to guide the interview:

- Personal history/involvement with the language

Can you tell me how you became involved in learning your language? When did you first become aware that you could learn your language? Was there anyone in particular who influenced your language learning? Was there any particular event that prompted you to learn your language? Did you speak Gwich'in with anyone this week?

- Reasons for learning

What were your reasons for learning your language? Was there anyone or anything in particular made you want to learn your language? Was there something you wanted to do with your language once you learned it?

- Opinions about language learning

Why are people trying to save Gwich'in? Why do YOU think we should learn our language? What would you say to someone who questions why we should save our language? How have your opinions changed over the years about speaking Gwich'in? How does speaking Gwich'in relate to your identity as a Gwich'in person? How does the Gwich'in language relate to your home village?

- Goals

What goals do you have about learning Gwich'in? How do you plan to reach those goals? What kinds of community projects are out there that involve language use? If there are no community projects, then what kinds of projects do you think are needed? What do you see about the future of our language?

- Other

Is there anything you would like to add? Is there anything I did not ask that you think is important? Do you have any questions for me?

Màhsi' choo for agreeing to this interview. Would you like a copy of the transcript of this interview when it is typed up?

Appendix C: Questions General Participants

Ancestral Language Learning and Effects on Identity

Open-ended Interview Script for general participants

Interviewer: First of all, I would like to say màhsi' choo (big thank you) for talking to me. Before I begin, I want to make sure you are still willing to be a part of this study.

I would like to go over this form [informed consent] with you before we start. Here is a copy of the form. Do you have any questions for me about it? [review form with participant].

Is it OK to record our session? Màhsi' (thank you). Akò' (and now) – the recorder is on.

Interviewer: [State date and location] I am doing an interview to find out about what it means to be Gwich'in. Can you please say your name and home community for the record?

Interviewer: I want to remind you that this interview is completely voluntary, and you can ask me to stop the recording at any time. I can also destroy the recording and my notes on this interview if you ask me to, and you can request this at any time up until my research is published.

Is it OK with you if we keep going?

Interviewer: This interview will not have any structure to it, so you can feel free to focus on what you feel is important. I would like to remind you that you can and should avoid any topics that are uncomfortable.

I will use two languages—Gwich'in and English, depending on the person, and if their first language is Gwich'in.

These are some of the questions that I would like to ask:

1. Do you have a Gwich'in name?
2. If so, what does it mean?
3. Who gave you that name?
4. Who are your ancestors?
5. Where do you live?
6. How long have you been living in (placename)?
7. Where did you grow up?
8. What kinds of things did you do when you were growing up?
9. Do you still do some of those things today?
10. What kinds of memories do you have as you were growing up?
11. What is your favorite memory?
12. Did you grow up in a house?
13. If not, where did you live?
14. 70 and older: Did you go to school?
15. If so, where?

16. Did going to school change how you lived?
17. If so, what kinds of changes were there?
18. 60 and younger: Where did you go to school?
19. Did you have to leave the village to go to school?
20. If so, what was that experience like?
21. What kinds of things do you like to do in the village?
22. What kinds of traditional things do you like to do?
23. How does it make you feel when you do these traditional things?
24. Have you taught anyone how to do this/these (traditional thing(s))?
25. Are there any traditional things that you would like to learn?
26. What kinds of changes have occurred in your lifetime?
27. How did these changes make you feel?
28. What kinds of pressures are there to become like English speaking people?
29. Do you know the language?
30. If so, who do you use the language with?
31. When and where do you use the language?
32. If not, are you learning the language?
33. How are you learning the language?
34. Do you have a chance to practice what you learned with others?
35. How does it make you feel to be able to speak?
36. What do other people say to you when you speak the language?
37. Do you think you have to speak the language in order to be Gwich'in?
38. Where do you think Gwich'in should be learned? Why?
39. How about people who live in the city who say they're Gwich'in?
40. What does it mean to you when you say you're Gwich'in?

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a. Ancestors?
b. Knowing how to take care of the land?
c. Knowing how to live off the land?
d. Knowledge of traditional skill?
e. Knowing the language and using it?
f. Knowledge of culture?

---

g. Looks?

h. Knowing how to behave?

41. Is there anything else you would like to say about what it means to be Gwich'in?

Once I have transcribed this recording, I will meet with you again to see if you want to (1) change anything; (2) add anything or (3) answer any questions I may have. I would like to thank you very much for your time and patience.

Appendix D

Language Learning Topics and Conditions

	20 F	20 M	30 F	30 M	40 F	40 M	50 F	50 M	70 F
Lack of practice or learning opportunities	x	x	x			x	x	x	
Lack of speakers	x	x	x						
Non-use by speakers						x	x		
Amusement Laughter	x		x		x				
Peers not Speaking	x	x							
Translations	x				x		x		
Speakers: Slower Rate	x				x				
Attitudes									
Lack of peer interest	x	x							
Negative	x		x	x	x	x	x		
Bilingual classes									
Not taken seriously	x								
Single vocabulary			x			x			
No goals			x			x			
Understand more than speaking		x	x				x		
Lack of Native lg. teachers (certified and fluent)			x		x	x	x		
No intergenerational transmission			x		x	x	x		x
Need support			x			x	x		
No school support					x				
Need positive atmosphere			x			x	x		
Lack of patience						x	x		
Lack of curriculum			x						

Wants to learn	x	x	x	x				x	
Students want to learn						x			
Non-Active learner				x					
Mistakes					x		x		
Formulaic phrases (move beyond)					x		x		
2 Native lg. teachers per class (models)					x				
Lack of SLA/teaching knowledge			x		x	x	x		x
Can be taught by anyone who is a speaker									x
Negative history					x		x		
Low status of language						x			
English used to teach Gwich'in					x		x		